

"BORN AND RAISED IN THE BOONDOCKS": BISEXUAL  
MEN'S EXPERIENCES REARED IN RURAL AREAS

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REARED IN RURAL AREAS

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Abstract: This qualitative study addresses two gaps in knowledge of sexual minority identity development: (a) identity development of bisexual men and (b) the unique needs of bisexual men raised in rural environments. The researchers employed a multiple case study methodology, which allowed for contextual understandings of the lived experiences of rural bisexual men. A rural sample gives voice to the different needs, challenges, and resiliency factors of individuals raised in a rural setting. Current research on identity development and rural health outcomes are discussed, while topics such as biphobia and bisexual invisibility are also introduced and explained. These characteristics were chosen because of their emphasis on the social aspects of behavior and overall orientation toward social change. Data points include individual interviews on identity development, artefactual analysis, relational influence maps, and closing reflective interviews. Findings included themes in four primary areas: (a) understanding rurality; (b) relational factors of identity development; (c) controlling images; (d) community resources. These findings are applied to potential counseling interventions, advocacy efforts, and community resource development.

*Keywords:* bisexuality, community resources, identity development, multiple case study

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Much of the literature on sexual minorities addresses lesbian women and gay men, and bisexuals are often secondary in these studies (Barker & Langdridge, 2008; Worthen, 2013). The models of identity development that arise from these studies do not acknowledge concerns specific to the bisexual community (Brown, 2002). Similarly, most research with the LGBTQ+ community is conducted on urban populations, ignoring needs and issues specific to rural populations (McIntosh & Bialer, 2015). Because of these gaps in the literature, more research is needed addressing rural raised bisexuals. This study serves to address those gaps in the literature. Those who have lived this experience were interviewed for this study, in an effort to bring attention to rural bisexual men and their needs, including community resource concerns. The purpose of this study was to establish bisexual identity development for rural people as a unique occurrence, apart from urban populations. As most identity development models are based on urban populations, it is important to take into consideration issues in development that are exclusive to rural populations (Gray, 2009). Additionally, this study addressed the relational aspects of identity development, such as community reaction, social support, and societal views, and their effects on bisexuals. The researcher provides implications for counseling practice and

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Identity Development**

Identity development studies can be traced back to the work of Sigmund Freud and his psychosexual stages of development. Freud addressed the importance of sexual urges in an individual's development, beginning with the oral stage at birth and ending with the genital state at puberty (Barnes, 1952). Erick Erickson then moved conceptualizations of identity development to encompass psychosocial factors. Most widely known for his eight stages of psychosocial development, Erikson theorized that individuals complete stages of development starting with infancy and ending with death (Erikson, 1989). Each of these stages is characterized by a psychosocial crisis in which two factors compete for prominence within a person, i.e. trust versus mistrust (Erikson, 1989). Erikson noted that the adolescent psychosocial crisis was of particular importance, labeling it the "identity crisis" (Erikson, 1968). Adolescents transition from childhood to adulthood during this crisis and establish a sense of self that may compliment or contrast who society says they should be (Erikson, 1968).

Of particular importance to this study is the sense of sexual identity developed during the adolescent stage of development. Although linked to sexual orientation and sexual behavior, sexual identity encompasses how one conceptualizes his or her own romantic or sexual attraction (Shively & DeCecco, 1977). Sexual identity development is largely studied within development of sexual minorities, specifically emphasizing gay and lesbian identity development (Dillon,

Worthington, & Moradi, 2011). LGB individuals often develop their identity in unsupportive communities with people unlike them, unlike those of racial and ethnic minority groups (Rosario, Scrimshaw, Hunter, & Braun, 2006). Development as an LGB individual comes with many challenges associated with minority stress and negative stereotypes (Hamilton, 2011). One of the most significant contributors to the work on sexual identity is Alfred Kinsey. Kinsey developed Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale, colloquially referred to as the Kinsey Scale (Dodge, Reece, & Gebhard, 2008b). Although flawed in their designs and findings, Kinsey's studies are known for exposing the world to sexuality studies and for acknowledging the real existence of bisexuality (Fairington, 2008).

Jean Baker Miller (1976) proposed that individuals develop in relation to others. Important aspects of identity development include connection, growth-fostering relationships, controlling images, and relational images, among other things (Miller, 1986). Positive development occurs when individuals engage in growth-fostering relationships, which includes mutual empathy and empowerment (Miller, 1986). Various difficulties may arise when individuals feel disempowered or in a power-down position within relationships, resulting in disconnection (Miller, 1986). Miller's understanding of development in relation to others is of particular importance when one considers the negative controlling images LGB people face in society.

### **Bisexual Identity Development**

There is great disagreement regarding the definition of bisexual identity (Fairington, 2008). Various definitions include attraction to males and females (Morrow, 1989), attraction to multiple sexes or genders (Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009), sexual behavior with individuals of multiple sexes (Morgan & Thompson, 2007), and self-identification (Barker,

Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009). Importantly, some individuals choose to identify themselves for political reasons (Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009). Some use this label to bring awareness to an often ignored identity group (Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009). For purposes of this study, participants were defined as bisexual based on self-labeling. As a study on identity development, labels and understandings needed to be personal to participants. The act of labeling oneself is important for self-acceptance and authenticity (Savin-Williams & Cohen, 2015), resulting in self-labeling fitting the goal of empowerment for this project.

In Bradford's (2004) interviews of 20 bisexuals, individuals noted that lack of role models and social support delayed their identity actualization. Conversely, connection to a supportive community harbored more positive identity development experiences (Bradford, 2004). Meyer (2003) noted that identity development for bisexuals is continuous, never-ending, and personalized. Development is affected by the notion that bisexuality is seen by society as a transitional phase (Meyer, 2003). Importantly, the definition of bisexuality has been shown to be specific to the person using the label, leaving only partial overarching commonalities within the identity group (Reicherzer, 2005)

With established identity categories come identity development models. One of the most widely used bisexual identity development models came from Tom Brown. Brown (2002) built upon an earlier model of bisexual identity development and established the following four stages: Initial Confusion, Finding and Applying the Label, Settling in the Identity, and Identity Maintenance (which replaced "Continued Uncertainty;" see Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994). This model was developed on a population in San Francisco, California, an urban population. Using urban populations is common because of the convenience in sampling but may prove problematic when applying findings to rural populations.

## **Impact of Religion**

Religion is often an impactful portion of people's identities (Fowler, 1981). Historically, religious institutions have rejected LGBTQ+ identities, as many see same-sex sexual behavior as immoral (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001; Sherkat, 2002). Those who are part of religious groups that are not affirming may face severe psychological health disparities (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). These attitudes often require LGBTQ individuals to negotiate their religious identities and their sexual identities. Wood and Conley (2014) found that these negotiations typically take four forms, (a) identity integration; (b) compartmentalization; (c) rejection of sexual identity; (d) rejection of religious identity. Three of these negotiations, compartmentalization, rejection of sexuality, and rejection of religion result in individuals not being able to live authentically. No matter the outcome, the struggles brought on by rejection, discrimination, and religious struggles often cause psychological distress (Ellison & Lee, 2010). Conversely, if individuals join LGBTQ-affirming religious communities, then they are more likely to integrate their faith and sexuality (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005). Importantly, sects of mainstream religions seem to be growing more accepting of homosexuality (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). Examples of this growing acceptance include recent changes in stances on homosexuality in some mainline Protestant churches, the establishment of the Gay Christian Network, celebration of LGBTQ+ identities found in the Unitarian Universalist Church, and acceptance in Reform and Reconstructionist Jewish faith groups. Similar to larger societal views, religious acceptance of bisexual and transgender lives may be lagging behind (Bernhardt-House, 2010). This lack of acceptance may negatively impact bisexual men's identity development.

## **Bisexual Invisibility**

A consistent finding in psychological literature is that members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community require connection to community resources and other like individuals for positive development (Kawachi, 2006). This need is habitually not met for bisexual individuals because they are part of an invisible population. Often ignored or lumped with gay men and lesbians in psychological literature, community outreach, and public policy, unique needs of bisexuals get ignored by mainstream society (Steinman, 2001). Bradford (2004) interviewed 20 participants that identify as bisexual and reported themes contributing to invisibility included lack of role models, lack of support, and biphobia.

Although approximately 2.2% of women and 1.4% of men self-identify as bisexual (American Institute of Bisexuality, 2015), outwardly these individuals can easily be misconstrued as gay, lesbian, or heterosexual, depending on the sex of a partner or friends they may have. Some gay men and lesbians see this as bisexuals attempting to maintain a piece of their heterosexual privilege (Eliason, 2000). Unfortunately, these assumptions undermine the identity of bisexuals and are rooted in biphobia and can result in bisexuals giving up part of their identity for the sake of a better understood and accepted label. Individuals who do acknowledge bisexuality in life and literature often see it as an unobtainable "utopia" that could unify humanity under an umbrella of sexuality (Barker & Langdridge, 2008). Steinman (2001) purported that bisexual invisibility and its negative effects can be eliminated if bisexuals are connected to community resources directed specifically to meet their needs. Establishing more information about bisexuals' identity development patterns can help community outreach organizations better meet the unique needs of these individuals.

## **Societal Stereotypes**

Bisexuals are faced with many negative controlling images put forth from dichotomous views of sexuality (Obradors-Campos, 2011). Prominent examples of stereotypes about bisexuals include: (a) bisexuals do not exist (Zivony & Lobel, 2014), (b) bisexuality is a phase between a solidified heterosexual or homosexual identity (Meyer, 2003), (c) bisexuals cannot make up their minds or are confused (Fox, 1991), (d) bisexuals are sexually promiscuous (Israel & Mohr, 2004), and (e) bisexuals are not suitable partners because they cannot be monogamous (Udis Kessler, 1996). These stereotypes are perpetuated by both heterosexuals and homosexuals. Negative images can lead to bisexuals' identities and rights being devalued or erased. Not only are these images incorrect, they have negative effects on bisexual individuals including less rates of coming out, more social isolation, and negative mental and physical health issues.

## **Biphobia**

Homophobia has been defined as an "irrational fear or intolerance of homosexuality (Bhugra, 1987). In his review of homophobia literature to 1987, Bhugra noted that negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians were often rooted in stereotypes and misunderstandings. Internalized homophobia refers the process by which LGBTQ individuals turn homophobic cultural values inward (Malyon, 1982). This internalization has been associated with negative health outcomes, greater minority stress (Szymanski & Chung, 2003), relational distress (Frost & Meyer, 2009), and lower self-esteem (Allen & Oleson, 1999), and poses difficulty for HIV prevention strategies (Huebner, Davis, Nemeroff, & Aiken, 2002). Biphobia is an oppressive force used to discriminate against, and persecute bisexuals (Jorm, Korten, Rodgers, Jacomb & Christensen, 2002). This draws from the earlier established homophobia. Unique to biphobia, is the potential for perpetration by both heterosexuals and homosexuals. While lesbians and gay



men are often belittled by their heterosexual peers, bisexuals are also belittled by their sexual minority peers (Herek, 2004).

Biphobia was found to be a measurable construct by Mulick and Wright Jr. (2002). The Biphobia Scale is a measure of biphobic attitudes, and Mulick and Wright Jr.'s (2002) study showed that 42% of individuals surveyed scored in the moderate to high biphobic range. This sample consisted of both heterosexuals and homosexuals. These attitudes can often lead to lower reported levels of mental health, greater internalized biphobia, and more difficult coming out processes (Jorm et al., 2002). Biphobia surrounds people that identify as bisexual and are told they are not natural by heterosexuals and other sexual minorities, leading to deficits in health and social environments (Jorm et al., 2002).

Obradors-Campos (2011) purported that biphobia is rooted in "gender binarism" and hegemonic masculinity. The gender binary refers to societal views of men and women being natural opposites and that division being the "normal" method of human behavior (Obradors-Campos, 2011). Hegemonic masculinity stems from American views of the gender binary, referring to the traditional roles men are expected to take, such as constricted displays of emotion, focus on the self, and being the breadwinners of families (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Bisexuality inherently defies these concepts, as two assumptions of the binary are rigid differences between masculinity and femininity and rigid sexuality, most commonly heterosexuality, as the norm (Obradors-Campos, 2011).

### **Health Outcomes**

Bisexuals often report more negative health outcomes than their heterosexuals, lesbian, and gay peers (Bostwick, 2005). Previous research has shown that bisexuals often report higher levels of anxiety (Davis & Wright, 2001), depression (Dodge & Sandfort, 2007), suicidal

ideation (Jorm, Korten, Rodgers, Jacomb, & Christensen, 2002), and substance abuse (Drabble, Midanik, & Trocki, 2005). Dodge, Jefferies, & Sandfort (2008a) found that STI/HIV rates are also significantly higher for bisexual men than their gay and heterosexual peers. Less attention has been given to sexual health of bisexual women. With these negative health outcomes, come negative societal stereotypes that leave bisexuals feeling isolated from community (Eady, Dobinson, & Ross, 2010; Kawachi, 2006).

Recent studies have sought to identify ways to improve bisexual health. Dodge et al. (2012) interviewed 75 behaviorally bisexual men on important issues when seeking health services and found that privacy and trust were the two most important aspects for participants. Participants often wanted to assure that they were not going to be forced to disclose their sexuality (Dodge et al., 2012). In conducting this study, Dodge et al. (2012) had participants identify the best ways to reach bisexual men with health services and many noted individual case management would be most effective. Eady, Dobinson, & Ross (2010) found that it was important for mental health service providers to be open and positive when bisexuals disclose their sexual experiences. Also of importance in for enhancing bisexual health is connection to a community and community resources (Ebin, 2006). Ebin (2006) noted the importance of efforts such as phone counseling and support groups in reducing HIV rates among bisexual individuals. Connection to other bisexuals and to bi-positive resources proves fruitful for promoting positive health (Ebin, 2006).

### **Rural Life**

It is important to note that definitions of rurality differ based upon the organization or person classifying the area and each definition accounts for only part of the rural experience (Waldorf, 2006). For example, the Index of Relative Rurality takes into account population size,

population density, percentage of urban residents, and distance to metropolitan areas (Waldorf, 2007). According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 60 million Americans live in areas that would be classified as rural (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This same census defined a rural area as an area that is not "urban" or "peri-urban" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The Rural Health Research Center at the University of Washington (RUCA) defines a rural area as an area in which the primary flow of commuting is to an outside area, typically to an urbanized area or urban cluster (Rural Health Research Center, 2015). Importantly, RUCA defines a small town as having primary flow to a small urban cluster (Rural Health Research Center, 2015). These classifications are based on population density, urbanization, and daily commuting (United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2015). For purposes of this study, participants were allowed define rurality with loose parameters of not living in a metropolitan city. As a study on identity, it was important for participants to be allowed to define rurality for themselves and how it impacted their lives.

Rural America is often classified by many health challenges. Americans from rural areas often report higher risk of diabetes (Hale, Bennett, & Probst, 2010), smoking, obesity, and other chronic illness (Joyner, O' Connor, Thrasher, & Blouin, 2012). Individuals from rural communities also report comparable levels of mental health concerns to their urban counterparts (McCabe & Macnee, 2002). Little of this research addresses the needs of LGB individuals in rural areas. Boehmer (2002) found that on 0.1% of health research is on LGBT health and most of this is concentrated in urban areas. Fisher, Irwin, & Coleman (2014) noted that LGBT individuals in rural areas are less likely to have health insurance and more likely to smoke and binge drink than their urban counterparts. Although little research exists on the actual topic of

LGB rural health, it is not unfounded to assume that they exist at the intersection of rural health issues and LGB health issues.

### **Resources**

Although individuals from rural areas face significant health issues, they often have less health resources to seek for assistance (McCabe & Macnee, 2002). According to the National Rural Health Association Policy Position (2008), only 12% of pharmacists and 9% of physicians practice in rural areas, while 20% of U.S. citizens live in rural areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE; 2012), a disparity between mental health services also exists between rural and urban areas, despite comparable rates of mental health issues.

WICHE identified three main restraints to mental health services in rural areas: (a) accessibility of nearby services, (b) availability of existing health providers, and (c) acceptability of needing assistance. In order to counteract these issues, various community resource agencies have attempted to reach out to rural communities in novel ways, such as telehealth (Rural Assistance Center, 2015) and rural health educators and assistants (National Rural Health Association, 2015). Within these initiatives, specific facets of rural LGB health are not addressed. Bisexual men and women report more barriers to accessing care and resources than their gay and lesbian counterparts (Smalley, Warren, & Barefoot, 2015). Medical and mental health providers have been shown to embrace some of the negative stereotypes of bisexuals (Gay and Lesbian Medical Association, 2001), which is problematic when coupled with health disparities bisexuals face.

Additionally, LGBTQ+ individuals in rural areas report weak resources, hostile social climates, and isolation as barriers to accessing community resources (Oswald & Culton, 2003).

Bisexual people may not access these resources because they feel like resources are oriented toward only gay and lesbian people (Dobinson, Macdonnell, Hampson, Clipsham, & Chow, 2005). In their study of rural LGBTQ+ individuals in South Carolina, Coleman, Irwin, Wilson, and Miller (2014) found that the community lacked assistance with legal documents, finding LGBTQ+ safe businesses, connecting with faith communities, and accessing community resources. These findings were supported in Fisher, Irwin, Coleman, McCarthy, and Chavez's (2011) needs assessment of Nebraskan LGBT individuals. Although much of this sample was from a metropolitan area, 10% reported being from rural areas, and 66.6% of all participants felt their area lacked community resources for LGBT people (Fisher et al., 2011). LGBTQ+ individuals also struggle to access community resources in more urbanized states, such as New York. Frazer (2009) found that individuals from rural areas and small towns in New York were much more likely to report distance and transportation as barriers to community resources than their counterparts who lived in Manhattan. These findings from varying geographic areas display that LGBTQ+ individuals lack resources across the country.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

The research questions were developed from a relational-cultural theoretical perspective (RCT). RCT arose from the work of Jean Baker-Miller and has a large focus on social, intimate, and familial related relationships that a person is in (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons & Salazar II, 2008). The theory purports that all psychological well-being or "deficiencies" stem from positive and negative relationships (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons & Salazar II, 2008). Miller (1976) also noted the importance of controlling images in individual development. Controlling images refer to the distorted representations of disenfranchised groups, developed by dominant groups. RCT emphasizes the impact shame can

have on identity development, with specific impact on those who feel unworthy of love and connection due to negative controlling images (Reicherzer, 2005).

RCT also draws from a strong feminist and multicultural background, emphasizing intersectionality, which is the acknowledgement of intersecting marginalized identities (Frey, 2013). When conducting interviews, the social context, relationships, and intersections of identity of participants will be taken into account. Additionally, the interview will attempt to share power with the interviewee to avoid creating more shame and fear of disenfranchisement. These principles informed the development of interview questions, as they inquire about the environment participants grew up in and how others affected their identity development process.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the review of the literature, two questions were developed from an RCT perspective.

- 1) What are the identity development experiences of bisexuals raised in rural environments?
- 2) What community needs do these individuals have that are not being addressed?

These questions led to the development of two community action oriented question:

- 1) What kinds of community resources may be developed to benefit this population?
- 2) How can these resources be feasibly implemented?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed a qualitative multiple case study methodology. Qualitative research is designed to help researchers understand in-depth contextual experiences in participants' lives (Wang, 2008). Qualitative research has long been supported as an optimal paradigm for studying multicultural issues, including sexuality (Morrow, Rakhasha, & Castaneda, 2001) and has played an important role in counseling research since the 1980s (Gelso, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1984). This particular project began as a narrative inquiry study, but due to changes in sampling and a desire for more contextualized understandings of lived experiences, the methodology was changed to multiple case study. Being open to ongoing changes is part of qualitative research. Maxwell (1998) noted "...the researcher may need to reconsider or modify any design decision during the study in response to new developments or to changes in some other aspect of the design." Various participants decided to rescind their participation, while recruiting enough participants to have substantial data was difficult. These ongoing concerns resulted in trading a larger number of participants for more detail of each case.

#### **Research Design**

Case studies are designed to allow for contextual understandings of bound systems (Creswell, 2007), which can be comprised of individuals, events, and/or activities (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This design allows researchers to describe, explore, and/or explain a certain quintain, or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). For purposes of this study, the researchers employed

a multiple case study design to explore and explain our quintain, which is men's bisexual identity development in the context of rural upbringings and access to community resources.

Importantly, multiple case study uses separate cases for two purposes – in-depth explanation of single cases using multiple data points and to establish themes and findings across cases to better understand the quintain (Stake, 2006). For purposes of this study, the researchers examined how the phenomenon occurred across five cases. Stake (2006) purports that between four and 10 cases is optimal for multiple case study methodology. Less than four cases does not allow for enough depth in understanding, while more than 10 can be too broad to allow for in-depth exploration (Stake, 2006). The researchers use direct quotes from interviews, artifacts, and relational influence maps to respect each participant's unique experience, while melding stories to better understand the quintain.

### **Procedures**

The researchers employed four data points for each of the five cases. The primary investigator first interviewed each participant in a semi-structured manner (see Appendix C), regarding their identity development experiences. All interviews were conducted in-person, via Skype, or on the telephone, depending on what participants found convenient and comfortable. These interviews were approximately 30 minutes to an hour and a half in length. Interviews began by allowing participants the opportunity to define rurality and how their primary place of upbringing reflected that definition. Participants then described how they came to identify as bisexual and what coming to that identity was like for them. Interviews concluded with participants discussing any community resources for the bisexual community in their areas and what resources they would like to see if they could choose.



A final piece of the initial interview included encouraging participants to bring artifacts that represent their identity development and their community. Artifacts included photographs, mementos, and other references that impacted their bisexual identity. Using artifacts in research offers more contextualized data for researchers to supplement other forms of data (Polkinghorne, 2005). Participants were asked to describe the artefact and what it meant to them.

Participants then completed a relational influence map (see Appendix D). These maps were used to contextualize important relationships that impacted participants' identity development. Considering RCT as the theoretical perspective for this study, researchers determined it to be important to understand what relationships were supportive, neutral and barriers to participants' established identities. Participants grouped individuals in a grid system based on the type of relationship (family, friends, other significant individuals) and the influence these individuals had on their identity development (supportive/positive, neutral/disinterested, negative/barrier). Once participants completed this stage of the study, they were paid \$10.00 and asked to schedule a final exit interview. Participants were allowed to explain various individuals' impacts in their final interviews.

Researchers closed this study by completing exit interviews with each participant. The primary investigator conducted these interviews in-person, via Skype, or on the telephone, again allowing participants to determine what method was most convenient and comfortable for them. Participants were asked to reflect on their experience telling their story and explain any specific relationships on their relational influence maps. The researchers also encouraged participants to share any information they felt like they may have left out by accident. These data points were chosen to give participants the opportunity to tell their story in multiple ways. Initial interviews of experiences allowed for verbal storytelling, artifacts and relational influence maps served as

visuals to contextualize stories, and final interviews allowed participants to reflect on telling their story. Participants were paid \$20 after completing this final stage of the study. Importantly, all participants in this study chose a pseudonym in order to maintain confidentiality. Additionally, all records were stored in password protected computer files, which were on a password protected computer.

## **Participants**

### **Population**

The population of interest for this study was bisexual men who also were raised in a rural area for a significant portion of their developmental years. These individuals shared experiences of developing a bisexual identity, despite other unique experiences that may be attributed to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, etc. Many bisexual men inevitably face aspects of biphobia and have to learn how to manage their non-dichotomous identity in a culture that is dichotomous. To date, bisexual identity development models are normed on urban populations, which discount the unique experiences those in rural populations have, such as lower rates of acceptance and limited community resources (Gray, 2009).

### **Sample**

A sample of five participants was recruited for the study using listservs, advertisements through local LGBTQ+ community organizations, and established social networks. In order to account for the intersection of rural upbringing and bisexuality, the sample consisted of bisexual men who reported being raised in a rural environment. Importantly, Stake (2006) recommends evaluating cases for relevance to the quintain, providing diversity, and potential for complex understanding when recruiting participants. Participants identified with various diversity categories (see Appendix I), were from diverse geographic areas, and were varying ages, thus

keeping with Stake's principles. Only legal adults are used for purposes of consent and shared life experiences. Participants selected a pseudonym to use in this study, in order to maintain confidentiality.

**Sampling method.** Two sampling methods were employed for this study: (a) convenience sampling; (b) purposive sampling. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants that were already connected to organizations that researchers have connections with, such as the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to selectively recruit participants that met the specific criteria required for the quintain (Minke & Haynes, 2003; McNemar, 1940). These methods of sampling were appropriate for this qualitative study because the researchers are not trying to generalize to the whole population, and because they need participants that fit a certain groups: rural bisexuals.

### **Data Analysis**

For this study, initial interviews were transcribed by a paid transcriptionist and a team of coders individually coded the data, analyzing the stories for common themes. In an effort to establish trustworthiness via confirmability, all participants were encouraged to engage in a member check, which included assuring transcripts were reflective of their experiences. Only one participant completed this task. All coders completed their work from an RCT perspective. The researchers then gathered to compare individual codes after coding the first transcript, which established an evolving code scheme. This coding scheme was used to code each of the following initial interviews, with flexibility for new findings from each subsequent interview. The researchers met to establish final codes via consensus after finishing each transcript. After completing all coding, the primary investigator went back through each transcript to ensure all final codes were represented, if applicable. Codes were combined into broad themes based RCT

principles (i.e. controlling images, relational images) that construct a coherent narrative related to participants' identity development and community resource needs.

The second data point for this study was artifact analysis. Participants discussed each artifact and used them to further contextualize narratives. Various artifacts represented differing aspects of participants' identities, including relationships to others, inspirational internalized messages, and symbolic objects of pride. Artifacts are used throughout this document to characterize themes found from interviews. One participant, Hunter refused to submit an artefact, as he felt he could not find an object that represented his identity.

Relational influence maps comprised the third data point. Each map was examined by the primary investigator, who in turn asked clarifying questions about relationships in participants' final interviews. In many cases, these relationships reflected various influences discussed in participants' initial interviews. Upon completion of final interviews, the primary investigator incorporated these maps into the various themes established by the team of coders. Relational influence maps primarily described important aspects of participants' social climates, relational images, and ability to be authentic.

Final interviews also asked participants to reflect on their experiences completing this study and sharing their story. This interview served an important purpose for establishing the trustworthiness of the study. Authenticity in qualitative research refers to a study's ability to genuinely represent the lives of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These final interviews established authenticity through allowing participants to assure researchers this experience was representative of them. If the narratives were not representative, participants were allowed to clarify and add to their stories. Many participants also took time in the final interview to discuss the catharsis of this experience.

## **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the need to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in a qualitative study (Shenton, 2004). The researchers established trustworthiness of this study in various ways. In addition to confirmability and authenticity, the researchers established coherence of the study by selecting an appropriate method for the phenomenon. Multiple case study allowed for in-depth understandings of a population that is difficult to sample and largely understudied. The researcher also established trustworthiness through credibility. Findings in this study are believable given aforementioned literature on perceptions of bisexuals and data from rural health studies. The project was also made more trustworthy because sources of data that contradicted dominant narratives were not omitted. Sampling adequacy was established using Stake's (2006) recommendation of four to 10 cases (N=5).

The researchers also kept audit trails that included individually coded transcriptions, documents of the coding scheme at various phases, and logs of all audio files and images. Importantly, each document, audio file, and image is stored securely. Researchers initially coding separately also established authenticity of findings, as it allowed researchers to bring their own thoughts and perceptions to data analysis. Data were also triangulated using multiple data sources and investigators in order to establish trustworthiness of findings. Procedures of this study were described in this document in enough detail for this study to be recreated by other researchers, which can help establish transferability.

Finally, researchers also participated in reflexive practices to establish trustworthiness during this project. Reflexivity is the act of self-reflecting on the values one brings into qualitative research (Pezalla, Pettigrew & Miller-Day, 2012). The researchers discussed their interest in this study

and what they hoped to gain from it at their initial meeting. This study was not conducted from a value-free perspective. The researchers involved are advocates for sexual and gender minorities. The primary researcher also identifies as a bisexual man and was raised in rural areas. Each researcher recognized inequalities established by the power relations in society and strive to change them. With that acknowledgement, it is clear the researchers were more likely to strive

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

Based on an in-depth analysis of initial interviews, artifacts, relational influence maps, and closing interviews, the researchers found various themes in four broad areas (a) understanding rurality; (b) relational factors of identity; (d) controlling images; (c) community resources. These findings are described below using a combination of data points from various cases. All five cases are represented across findings, with varying degrees of representation across areas and themes. Verbatim quotes are used in order to maintain the authenticity of participants' stories.

#### **Understanding Rurality**

As previously stated, research provides varying definitions for what labels an area "rural". In order to understand how rurality impacted participants, each participant was asked to describe what makes an area rural and how their place of upbringing fit this description. Participants often talked to various cultural and social factors associated with rural areas, while also covering various objective features. Each individual discussed how this type of community impacted their identity.

#### **Features of Rural Communities**

Multiple participants described rural communities as places associated with agriculture and limited job opportunities. Firechild, Hunter, and Joe all discussed the importance of

agriculture for rural communities and their economies. Participants also discussed population and proximity to larger cities as primary aspects of rurality. The distance from larger cities often resulted in participants having limited access to cultural events and resources, with Firechild comparing living in urban communities to his rural experiences in the following way:

I've lived around rural people off and on, uh after that, but never to the extent of that, I didn't really realize what that was until I didn't, ya know, lived in cities.

Lived in New York for a while, um Dallas, and elsewhere and ya know you kind of go wow. Ya know, I went back for my 40<sup>th</sup> high school reunion and um, I was kind of shocked. I, I didn't realize, I didn't realize how the place looked when I was there, ya know?

Cultural aspects of rural communities were emphasized more than physical, proximal, and economic features. Participants associated rural communities as conservative, Christian, and often times close-minded. When asked about his definition of rurality, Robert offered this conceptualization:

Um, it's very colonized area. Um, so it's very like super Christian, specifically Baptist. Uh, it's very, um, if you wanna succeed be as like-dominant culture as you can. Um, very, yeah it's just very Christian. I guess Christian would be the best way to describe it.

Robert's story was unique in that it also emphasized his Native roots, as he identified his rural community as "colonized", referring to the adoption of European culture by Native communities (Hodge, Limb, & Cross, 2009). Randy supported Robert's notion that conservative Christianity is a dominant factor of growing up in a rural area.

### **Impact of Rural Upbringings**



Importantly, growing up in a rural area impacted most participants' bisexual identity and understanding of themselves. Firechild reported that the rural area did not impact his identity, while others felt it did. Many comments supported the notion that rural areas were not supportive of bisexual men. Joe was less direct than others with his views. "Um, ya know, I think growing up in a rural area has, it kind of affects it just because you're not sure how other people in the community are gonna take it." Other participants were much more direct in the negative impact rural communities can have on bisexual men. Randy reported facing much negativity from the Baptist church in his hometown.

I had a good friend um, who is now a Baptist preacher in Texas, who went to a Baptist church and I'll never forget now that you've asked me this whole thing. I remember going to a Baptist service on a Sunday morning and then hearing them explicitly say that homosexuality was abomination. And I just couldn't believe it that everybody was sitting there listening to that. So when I think of small towns, I think of conservative religiosity and I also think about folks talking negatively about non-heterosexual people.

The negative role of conservative religion was also displayed on Robert and Firechild's relational influence maps, who listed pastors and priests as barriers to their identity development. Hunter's relational map also emphasized the negative effects of conservative religion in rural communities, noting specific families from his church that were barriers to his bisexual identity. Conversely, Joe and Randy also identified aspects of acceptance from their rural communities. Randy found acceptance in more liberal religious spaces and open-mindedness in the Catholic Church, suggesting that religion and sexual minorities are not mutually exclusive. Joe described his overall community as open-minded.

Um, ya know, I think growing up in a rural area has, it kind of affects it just because you're not sure how other people in the community are gonna take it. Um, here luckily [my town] is not, although it's smaller, it's not that close-minded. People here in [my town] are actually pretty open and accepting.

### **Relational Factors of Identity**

Participants endorsed various aspects similar to Brown's (2002) model, which included four stages, (a) Initial Confusion; (b) Finding and Applying the Label; (c) Settling in the Identity; (d) Identity Maintenance. These stages were represented in various ways in participants' lives. Importantly, given the RCT framework of this project, these identity formation stories were examined for the power relationships and communities have on participants' identity development. This lens also allowed the researchers to examine the unique identity development experiences associated with growing up in a rural area. Relationships seemed to impact bisexual identity development in three primary areas, (a) early understandings; (b) defining bisexuality; (c) community.

### **Early Understandings**

Social climates heavily impacted participants' early understandings of themselves and bisexuality. Early identity formation experiences were often characterized by attraction and experimentation with others, which is common for sexual identity development. Unique factors that formed early understandings of sexuality were the role of media, role models, and exposure to various sexual identities. Although these factors play important roles in most LGBTQ+ identity development experiences, bisexual men from rural areas have limited exposure to diversity in their communities. Randy described his access to other LGBTQ+ individuals in this manner: "And there are fewer LGB people in small towns. Therefore people aren't exposed to it

as much and if they are exposed to it, it's a closeted music teacher. I mean is that a good role model? No." The importance of role models was salient across participants, with some participants lacking role models and commenting on that absence, while others who had them expressed the importance of those role models.

Randy's story described the importance of role models in-depth. He spoke of a gay uncle and an open-minded aunt, who both impacted him in positive ways. Randy's artifacts explicitly pointed toward the importance of these role models. He provided mountain ash from Mount St. Helens, which his aunt gave to him shortly after he came out to her. Randy kept this ash because it signified the first person who accepted him as bisexual. He also read his uncle's last letter before his death. While dying of AIDS, Randy's uncle wrote a letter dedicated to his partner. Although Randy's family did not allow him to have a close relationship with his uncle, Randy kept this letter because it showed him that he could potentially live a life as a non-heterosexual man and be happy. This letter also encouraged Randy to engage in bisexual advocacy as an adult.

Without role models, participants reported turning to media for exposure to diversity. Robert spoke about being exposed to bisexuality as an option while watching a bisexual male discover his own identity on *The Real World: DC*.

I didn't know bisexuality was a thing until I wanna say either my senior year of high school. I mean I heard girls say I'm bi but I didn't realize that that was something I could put on. And it's not something I could identify as. Um, yeah. Things that helped me out a lot growing up was um, in between the fights with my parents, in between all the craziness of being brought up in a religious home...um, was probably media representation. And one of the things that really stuck out to me was um, there was a character on Real World named Mike

Manning. Real World: DC and like that's, I think that's the point in my life where I was like, that's what I am. This is cool. Okay, like I can do this.

Other participants also spoke of various figures in the media that appeared to be sexually fluid, such as Freddie Mercury, Michael Jackson, David Bowie, and Billy Joe Armstrong, who exposed them to the potential to be something more, whether those individuals identified as bisexual or not. Joe also discussed the impact of media in his artifact discussion. He submitted a picture of a famous YouTube couple, Mark Miller and Ethan Hethcote, as his artifact because this couple provided him with the inspiration to believe he could be happy and accepted if he is in a relationship with a man. Joe specifically reference Mark and Ethan's catchphrase, "Everyday's a great day!" as a source of inspiration for his current confidence and happiness with his life as a bisexual man.

These early experiences were often mediated by participants' community reactions to LGBTQ+ individuals and their coming out experiences. Negative coming out experiences often led to conflicted views of themselves as bisexual and internalized biphobia, while positive coming out experiences were often important for self-acceptance. Most commonly, participants were met with mixed messages from their communities regarding their sexual identity. Joe described his coming out experience in the following way:

Ya know, it was easy for me. I have an aunt who's a lesbian. And so my family, yeah my family's uh very accepting um, ya know they were very supportive of her and her decisions and ya know her having all her partners and stuff like that and so um, I knew it was going to be easy uh, ya know, telling my family. I think the hardest part was telling friends because ya know, you never know what their

reactions are gonna be and lucky for me ya know, I'm blessed to have great friends who it doesn't matter to them.

Some others were unfortunately not as supported in their coming out experiences, with Hunter's father telling him his life was going to be difficult if he "made this choice". Robert described his family as conservative Baptists, and reported he has no intention to come out to them unless it is absolutely necessary.

Whether met with support or not, participants' stories pointed to the importance of family, friends, and communities when developing one's sexuality, and the unique role local culture plays in that process. Multiple participants spoke of how confident they became in their identity if others were accepting of them. This fact was specifically highlighted by Joe, Randy, and Hunter's relational maps, who listed many supportive relationships, including family, friends, and community organizations.

### **Defining Bisexuality**

As a study on identity, it was important for participants to include their own personal definitions of bisexuality, as this label means different things to different individuals and may be sometimes used as an umbrella term for other non-monosexual identities. These definitions were largely relational, as participants defined their bisexuality in varied ways, largely by who they were attracted to, in relationships with, or with whom they engaged in sexual behaviors. Joe and Hunter defined their bisexuality as attraction to both men and women, while Robert also identified this way but acknowledged the potential to be attracted to other genders in the future.

Well...I, I've thought about this a lot. I think it's because I am...(sighs)...I don't know, I don't wanna identify as pan...I think it's because traditionally I think I have been um, attracted to traditionally masculine males and traditionally

feminine females. That's the answer I should give you. But I think that's changing so I mean, my identity probably could change...I, I'm kind of becoming more open to other genders, to other expressions of genders, to...um, other people, that's, it's possible it could change but right now I can only see myself...um, my happy ending would be with one of those two.

Randy offered a broader definition with gender being more flexible but attraction still being the primary aspect of identity. His experience was also unique because he decided gay was a more appropriate identity label for him less than a week after completing this study. This change may reinforce the stereotype that bisexuality is a phase, but also speaks to fluid nature of sexuality across the lifespan.

I also have an update. For most of my life, I have identified as bisexual (33 years), but I now identify as gay. It has been a long complex journey, which I have shared already a good amount about with you. Thank you for being part of it. There are also a couple of other experiences that I may or may not have shared about, which I now better understand since having had a cathartic experience this past weekend. Nonetheless, having had the opportunity to participate in your interview (along with many many other factors/experiences/people in my life, especially fatherhood) contributed to this for me.

Firechild diverged from the other participants, defining his bisexuality as being in relationships and being sexually active with men and women. He was the only participant who had been in a long-term polyamorous relationship.

I will say one thing though, in fact we could get into a whole thing here...I've, I've written a little bit a few years ago, started to uh, started to put together a blog

called The Authentic Bisexual...AB and the uh, the thesis was that in order to, in order for me to live authentically, I am not an either or bisexual. I don't, I mean, I'm not a serial bisexual, where I can, where you want to have sex with a male partner for a few years and then I wanna have sex with a female partner for a few years. No, I want to have a family. And for me to have, for me to have a permanent, lifelong relationship with a person of one gender, um, that is not the authentic living for me. So polyamorous is really um, for me, that is authentic bisexuality.

Firechild also discussed the duality of bisexuality while presenting his artifact. He described an art piece he created called "The Tumbleweed", which his felt represented the multiple attractions bisexual people face. Firechild also felt the zig zagged portions of this piece represented the fluid nature of attractions bisexual individuals often describe. Importantly, this finding does not suggest that men who identify as bisexual fluctuate in identity based on who they socialize with; rather this finding suggests that people's identities are based on personal factors, of which relationships are a primary aspect.

## **Community**

The importance of community in participants' bisexual identity was salient. Participants expressed a desire for community growing up, if they lack support and other bisexual individuals. Robert, who left his rural community once he was old enough to live on his own, described his desire for community with the following:

Um, pretty much why I decided to get out, I wanted to leave because I wanted to meet people like me or not, especially like I wanted to meet people like me but I also wanted to meet people who were different from me.

Joe described the importance of his hometown being accepting of his bisexuality, while Hunter emphasized the pivotal role his friends, both LGBTQ+ and heterosexual, played in his self-acceptance. Randy spoke at length about the importance of other like-minded individuals, who were also bisexual.

But I had a buddy of mine in the public school in the city before we moved to the small towns who was um, a, like a math whiz kid, and uh, he was open-minded and we, we didn't do anything but we had a lot of similar interests in regards to uh, science, ya know, being open-minded and come to find out, years later, in his early 20's he ended up, unfortunately, taking his own life. I don't know if it was related to sexuality or not but my hunch was there was some stuff going on there that he, he had going on...Um, and I always have found that I gravitated towards bisexual people so that's that's something and so I felt a connection with him and then with a buddy of mine in that school as well.

The importance of community was also present in various relational maps and artifacts. All participants identified key relationships that helped establish their identities and enhance their confidence and comfort in being bisexual. Randy specifically listed a Bisexual Alliance group as a primary source of support for his identity. Robert also discussed the importance of connection to the bisexual community and Native culture when explaining his artifact, which was a backpack that had the bisexual pride flag colors, blue, purple, and pink.

My backpack, I bought it specifically because it's blue, pink, and purple. So it's your bisexual colors but it's also an inspired by Native American design. And so I felt like, like, I was shopping with my friend whom you know. Um, I was like I feel like this represents me, like it's bisexual colors and it's Native American



inspired and like, ahhhhh. You know you want it. And I was like, you're supposed to talk me out of these things. But yeah, um, this backpack, I guess, I feel like it represents me. I wear it everywhere now.

It is apparent from these findings that community and social support are paramount in these men's bisexual identity development. This need is often not met for bisexual men, which informed the community resources participants suggested, described in detail in a later section.

### **Controlling Images**

While discussing their experiences as bisexual men, participants often endorsed negative controlling images associated with the bisexual community. Various participants endorsed images primarily in three themes (a) bisexual erasure; (b) gendered expectations; (c) biphobia. These themes seemed to impact participants' perceptions of themselves and their connections to others. Some of these images also informed participants' community resource suggestions, discussed in the next section.

### **Bisexual Erasure**

Participants often reported that their identities as bisexual men were erased in various ways. This erasure often resulted in participants having to come out multiple times in various contexts, as evidence by Firechild's experience.

Uh, but I guess you can just kind of, people can just kind of tell that uh, ya know, that I like guys and that even though I, I didn't really say anything about it, it, it was, it was just known that, and of course, it's presumed that I was gay, never presumed that I was bi. So I felt, I felt obliged sometimes to set the record straight.

Importantly, participants reported bisexual erasure from both heterosexuals and within the LGBTQ+ community. Firechild capture this two-way erasure in this poignant statement:

And, and of course, you know that whole thing about if nobody on either of side of that Kinsey scale believes that bisexuals exist. They, they think it's your uh, ya know, you're just, you're gay and you can't admit it yet.

Even significant people in participants' lives often silenced their sexual identities. The most egregious example of this was a romantic partner of Randy's seeing his bisexuality as a phase. Additional sources of erasure included media representation and community resources. Interestingly, Robert also addressed that bisexuality is erased by the inaccurate assumption that bisexuality reinforces the gender binary, which stands in direct contrast to Obradors-Campos's (2011) claim that biphobia is rooted the discomfort bisexuality causes when we think of gender as binary. "That's very, I know there's a lot of like angst against it, not angst, but I guess people think that if you identify as a bisexual you are um, being binary."

Importantly, relationships could also serve the opposite function and provide visibility for participants. Each participant reported various relationships on their relational influence maps that were positive for their identity development, including family members, friends, religious communities, and bisexual community groups in their current hometowns. These informed suggested community resources that emphasized openness of bisexuality as an option when discussing sexuality with others

### **Gendered Expectations**

Participants acknowledged various gendered expectations that impact their lives as bisexual men. As previously noted, bisexuality has been associated with distorting the gender binary (Obradors-Campos, 2011), and that biphobia may be largely due to this fact. Participants

endorsed experiences that would align with this notion, such as Randy experimenting with gender and being told he could not by his dad.

...at the age of 6 or 7 I was reaching out to like try on my mom's shoes, ya know, she had these great high heels. I reached at them and then my dad said, 'You will not do that. That is, that is unacceptable.' Those, those two sentences actually have, were, were engrained in my mind as a kid and I carried them for gosh, 2 decades, 2 decades and it was um, something that I talked to him about in later years and he didn't even know that it had such an impact on me.

As evidenced by Randy's statement, these negative experiences may impact bisexual individuals for quite some time, without understanding from dominant groups. Firechild also noted how his interests resulted in others perceiving him is something other than heterosexual.

I mean, I was a composer. I was a painter. Um, uh, I was a math whiz and ya know, I was ya know, part of different clubs and things like that and sort of I, I, uh, I was out there I guess is what I'm saying and, and I wasn't out. Ya know? Not, not by any means...but I guess you can just kind of, people can just kind of tell that uh, ya know, that I like guys and that even though I, I didn't really say anything about it, it, it was, it was just known that, and of course, it's presumed that I was gay, never presumed that I was bi.

Importantly, Firechild notes that he was never assumed to be bisexual, which reinforces bisexual erasure. This erasure is particularly apparent in bisexual men's lives, who are often assumed to be gay (Meyer, 2003).

Participants also noted societal perceptions of male bisexuality as harmful to their experiences. When asked about differences and similarities between experiences being a bisexual

man and perceived experiences of bisexual women, participants consistently felt like men were less likely to be taken seriously as bisexual. Hunter shared this view of differences.

...for guys who are bi, um...very few people are ever, very few people have ever asked me, are you sure you're not straight? But I'm asked all the time, are you sure you're not gay? Um, regardless of the fact that like my interactions with both genders are the same, like as far as where my boundaries are, as far as who I spend time with, like for I mean girls and, guys and girls it's almost, I mean there's different aspects there but at the end of the day like...the way, the way that like my attraction expresses itself to them but also the way that platonically I interact with both genders is like the same...with guys, it's, I don't know, it's, it's weird, but girls I know who are bisexual, um, or even, girls I know who are lesbian, um...don't seem to get asked as much. Like, are you sure you're one or the other? It's just like, that's fine because that's like girls are allowed to do that I guess. Girls are allowed to be affectionate with everyone. It doesn't mean, it doesn't affect their orientation, whereas guys it's always pushing towards like the more like the sexual side of the spectrum.

Hunter's experience also seemed to be rooted in the fact that men are not allowed to be affectionate toward platonic friends. Joe echoed this notion in his view that women are allowed more flexibility due to different perceptions in same-sex sexual behavior.

Ya know, I, I think that women probably have it easier, um, because when you think about from a guy's perspective, ya know, like a straight guy, ya know, it turns them on thinking about the fact of two women, ya know, being together. Um, even from a woman's perspective, ya know, and the girls like, oh I would

totally make out with another girl or hook up with another girl. Ya know, it, everyone seems open about that, but when you think about two guys together, everyone's like no, that, that's, ya know, the devil, ya know, it's against the bible, it's an abomination, and so I, ya know, I think that people are hypocrites. Um, ya know, if you're gonna hate one thing then you need to hate all aspects of it. You can't be biased because two girls wanna be together. You can't be biased against two guys. I don't know, it's, I think it's probably easier for girls.

This view bases women's sexuality around the male gaze, which is problematic for women's identity development and for men who have attractions and behaviors with multiple genders. Firechild also expressed that it may be easier for bisexual women because of the male gaze.

And I think for that reason, um, it must be different for, for bisexual women than it is for men. It must be a lot easier for them to, um, maybe, uh, maybe, this is my own bias showing but I think it's probably easier for a bisexual woman to tell her heterosexual male partner that uh, she's got a girlfriend or wants to have a girlfriend um, maybe in part because it's that um, crazy I don't know, it's real, and it certainly isn't real for me, men always fantasize having sex with two women and that's never been one of my great big fantasies but I understand it.

Despite the problematic nature of this perception of women's sexuality, these experiences point toward consistent erasure of bisexual men.

## **Biphobia**

Participants experienced biphobia in various ways in their lives. Biphobia took the form of passive aggressive comments and name calling, such as Robert's experience. "Um, I kinda

was called all kinds of names. Um, both racist and like super homophobic as well, biphobic I guess is what you would call it.” Robert’s biphobic experiences were intersectional in that people often used racist and biphobic language. His experience points toward the importance of viewing discrimination from an intersectional perspective, as individuals may have interweaving areas of privilege and marginalization. Hunter also shared an experience in which biphobia intersected with religion, which is a common source of friction for LGBTQ+ people. While working at a religious university, Hunter experienced much discrimination and hostility for being bisexual.

[my university] is a very Baptist, and very conservative, and very not okay with any of that. Um, I also started being more...once I kind of realized...I don’t know...I have a heart for like social justice and activism and all that. So like, when I came out, I started, even before I came out, I started being more vocal about like my views for like marriage, and this is right before marriage equality came down and all that, um, and then that stuff came out and so I started being a lot more vocal about it and over the summer I got a call from the director of residential life at [my university] and he’s like, hey, he’s like, ya know what you’ve been putting on social media doesn’t reflect the views of the university, like, you’re gonna have to take that down and I was like, okay...So I took it down and, and there was some like tension there about like, is this like, part of it I felt like it was almost like retreating back into the closet because like I wasn’t being as open but um.

As described by Hunter, his views were silenced by the religious university he worked with, and he also felt like he was being forced back into the closet. Unfortunately, his

experiences only became more outright discriminatory once he decided to be open about his sexuality.

...I told myself, I was like I'll go back to [my university] and I'll be even more like open about it, like to make up for that and so I did that. So the first couple months there I was like very open with a lot of people about my sexuality. Not my boss and not other staff, but like it was known on campus by my friends, like I wasn't hiding it, um, but I didn't put stuff on social media anymore, um, well just through...a very complicated series of like them going back to stuff I put on social media and all that, um, I, we kept having these meetings with them about, they kept calling me in for meetings about like why I put that stuff on social media, and, um, why I had issues with [my university]'s policies about that and like even though I wasn't being public on there, I was publicly speaking out against like [my university]'s policies regarding gender inclusion and orientation and finally it was um, it was September 21<sup>st</sup>, um, I'd been there for about six weeks at this point, um, other than that my job had been going great. I'd knew most of my residents because I had some of them last year and they asked to have me again, so like it was a really good atmosphere. Um, and I got called into a meeting and he was like, let's try to visit the 21<sup>st</sup> and I called into a meeting, and they kept just like dogging on, why are you doing all of this, like why do you feel the need to do it, and I was like...let's just get this out there, like, I'm bi. I do this because like I feel like there's discrimination here, like I just can't be okay with that and they're like, okay, we appreciate you telling us, um, it was fine.

Hunter attempted to advocate for his community on social media, which is a common form of advocacy in society today. This work and outspoken support for marriage equality resulted in multiple meetings with his boss that other students were not required to have, and an overarching feeling of discomfort.

It was over and the next day, um, my manager, he texted me, he was like, hey can you come in for a meeting and it was actually, it fell um, aside from all the other meetings we'd been having and every other Tuesday was like the actual one on one sit down with everyone that was just about your evaluations and all that. Um, so it was our actual day for the meeting. He had me come in early and so I came in and he was like, ya know, I appreciate your communication with us about all of that, blah, blah, blah, and said some other stuff and he's like we want you to stay on staff here and he's like, we're gonna give you three guidelines you have to abide by and I was like okay, and he was like, the first one is you can't do anything on social media about like the university or the policies and I was like, okay. That's what I've been doing but ya know. He's like, the second thing is if you have any students who come to you with issues regarding like gender orientation, you're not allowed to counsel them because we're supposed to counsel them about that and refer them and all that and if you can't counsel them, you have to send them to someone else and I was like, okay, that's stupid, but okay, um, and he's like, the third thing, you can't be out. Ya know, it's like, oh, I was just like, I can't, like go back, like it's not a thing and everyone knows, like everyone knows. It doesn't matter if I tell people I'm not. I'm not gonna do that and he's like, okay, he's like, he's like, that's what we thought, um, and then he



reached into his desk and like pulled out my termination letter. And he was like, there ya go, and I was like, oh, wow, okay and so they fired me. Um, and so, so that happened. That kind of shocked me.

Hunter described this experience in great detail and transferred schools because it took away his ability to be authentic and create community. He was fired for not agreeing to support the discriminatory policies of his university and for not agreeing to be closeted. Experiences like Hunter's and Robert's confirm the negative environments that some bisexual men live in, which may cause internalized biphobia. Hunter's environment was a specific example of how biphobia may be internalized and cause problems being authentic. Before Hunter was secure in his identity, he offered the following advice to a young boy coming out. "And he came out to me and I responded, I mean I responded what I thought was good. I was like, it's okay, you'll get over it, like it's a phase, like all of that stuff. We'll pray it away." These experiences often cause bisexual men to struggle to accept themselves, which may result in greater mental health concerns, unhealthy coping, and self-hatred.

### **Community Resources**

A common theme across all participants was a lack of community resources available to rural bisexual men. When asked this question, Robert simply replied, "No...none!" while laughing at the question. Each participant acknowledged they knew of no local resources in their rural communities, with the exception of Joe, who was familiar with the LGBTQ+ student group at a local university. Importantly, this organization was only accessible to university students, not community members.

Hunter emphasized the importance of accessing national resources as paramount to his development and health.

...like Trevor Project is a big one because it gave me someone to talk to, um, there's always someone to talk to and someone who understood and all that...It Gets Better was another, just going and like washing the windows. Um, I know that they don't people to talk to so it kind of a resource, kind of not...Um, since then for me, Gay Christian Network has been really good.

Hunter also spoke of the importance of accessing resources in metropolitan areas that he was referred to by a counselor.

...she referred me to um, yes, Youth Equality Services. It's, um, an organization in Oklahoma City. It's actually a...I don't know why I can't remember words right now...a mission of an organization, um, Community, or Expressions Community Church in Oklahoma City. So it's Expressions, um, they run...a group of them run Youth Equality Services, which is 12-20 year olds, LGBT, um...just a group therapy oriented environment, um, and so I went down, and so she referred me to that and so I went like that week on Thursday, um, and that really, that's the only time I've ever been and it was like... it was great and it was so good but I went and I met all my friends and hung out with them the whole summer and like, I just needed that first like step to get to know people...

One unexpected finding from two of the five cases was that some participants did not feel like they needed community resources to help support their bisexuality. Both Joe and Firechild expressed this opinion, with Firechild stating, "I, I didn't feel I had a need for counseling or, or special, more variety of healthcare..." Joe added:

I don't feel like I need them at my, at this point in my life or did ever really need them. Again, ya know, I grew up with a, an aunt who was a lesbian and um,

actually a couple of my best friends are, are gay or lesbians and so it was nice to have those people as my support system.

Joe's statement pointed to the value a supportive or open environment played into his lack of need for community resources, as his family and friends were exceedingly supportive of his identity. Firechild echoed these claims, as he also claimed to have a very supportive family.

So I, I came out to my parents when I was 14, so it was pretty easy. Apparently it was easy for me to, to, talk about it. I didn't have all the words yet, but ya know, I, I was articulate enough and open enough with my parents that I could, that I could do that. I grew up in a very liberal household. So ya know, liberal democrats.

These stories may point toward a mediated need for community resources when one already has a growth-fostering support network.

Fitting with the community-change oriented nature of this project, participants were asked to hypothesize what community resources would be beneficial for bisexual men in rural communities. Some participants' suggestions were broad, such as advocating for bisexual visibility and environments where healthy sexuality can be discussed, including within the LGBTQ+ community. Multiple participants also expressed the importance of discussing polyamory as an option. Firechild offered this suggestion: "And if there was some way to make us more visible, some way to, ya know, to make, the uh, the reality of bisexuality, uh, something that is shared more broadly in the community..." Robert also supported these broad notions in his interview.

Um, I would have liked to have more um, discussions around development of sexual identity and um, what that would mean for someone like myself. Thirdly, I

would have liked to have had more discussions about um, alternative lifestyles, um, such as polyamory. Um, and things like that that are common in the bisexual community, which um, are, are still left of the table even in the most progressive places that are doing LGBT guidance lessons and things like that even today. Ya know I always was like, man there's gotta be another way to build this model. Ya know I was always thinking more of, ya know, higher space when it came to like being in the world and like, there was always a void.

Similarly, Randy also felt it would be important for young bisexuals to have open access to information about bisexuality, polyamory, and potential role models.

Um, they need um, they need, they need to read about the lives of bisexual people. They should be allowed to read and watch movies about bisexual people, those who've been successful, those who've been civil rights leaders. Um, um, they need to learn about how to have a family in a different way. Um, they need to learn about ethical non-monogamy. Um, they need to, schools needs to allow people to come in and talk about their family dynamics

Other participants offered more concrete suggestions, such as Joe emphasizing the importance of counseling services for bisexuals in rural areas, and Firechild advocating for broader medical services. Another common suggestion was establishing local organizations that bring together bisexuals and their allies. Both Robert and Joe emphasized the importance of establishing LGBTQ+ centers in rural areas, with Robert emphasizing the importance of having a youth outreach center.

Um, for me...I would love to see a youth center. Anywhere. I think those have a very, a very good mission but at the same time they have, they can be as versatile

as they need to be to allow ya know, specific avenues for other identities as well.

As far as the community goes.

Although these needs may not currently be met, individuals' were able to hypothesize potential solutions to meet those needs. Participants' suggestions pointed toward the need to establish growth-fostering environments for bisexual people, which aligns with RCT's values on communities impacting identity development.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Primary findings of this study include greater understanding of personal definitions of rurality and how that impacts bisexual identity development and an appraisal of community resource access for bisexual men in rural areas. Previous definitions have relied on various population statistics, commutes, and resources (Rural Health Research Center, 2015; Waldorf, 2007). Some participants reflected various aspects of these defining features, while also discussing the culture that comes with rural life. These characteristics largely consisted of rural life being associated with conservative values and traditional religion. An unexpected finding in this study was the salience of religion in these men's lives. Most reported being impacted by disenfranchising religious views and practices or acknowledged their presence in rural culture. Despite the chosen definition, this finding implies that rural life is a very personal, contextual experience and impacts the way clients see themselves and relate to others.

Limited research has addressed identity development of bisexual men, with a small amount of the research done in rural areas. This study provided a relational understanding of how these men develop their bisexual identity. All stages of Brown's (2002) identity development model were represented by participants in various ways, confirming that his model may be appropriate to apply to these men. Unique findings of male bisexual identity development include the impact rurality, relationships, and communities have on these men. Based on findings, men who reported stronger social networks typically had more positive developmental

experiences related to their sexuality. Those who grew up in less supporting environments shared more stories of biphobic experiences and internalized biphobia while attempting to understand their sexuality. This finding directly aligns with RCT, acknowledging that growth-fostering relationships are paramount for optimal development.

Additionally, Fairington (2008) noted that there is disagreement about the definition of bisexuality, and this study confirmed defining bisexuality is a very personal process. Various definitions were represented, including attraction to males and females (Morrow, 1989), attraction to multiple sexes or genders (Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009), sexual behavior with individuals of multiple sexes (Morgan & Thompson, 2007), and self-identification (Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009). These participants defined their identities based on personal experiences but were also impacted by having access to bisexuality as an option. Some participants were not exposed to bisexuality until adolescence or later, which often left participants feeling directionless in finding labels. The flexibility in defining bisexuality actually allows participants to incorporate unique aspects of their identities, while still providing an established sexuality label. This finding suggests that the disagreement in defining bisexuality may actually be its greatest strength for inclusivity and diversity. Additionally, this finding echoes the findings of Diamond, Dickenson, and Blair (2016). These authors found that participants who were “bisexually attracted” experience more changes in attraction than their gay, lesbian, and heterosexual counterparts (Diamond, Dickenson, & Blair, 2016). Changes in attraction may impact definitions of one’s bisexual identity, resulting in ongoing negotiations of what bisexuality means for them.

This study revealed very limited community resources for bisexual men in rural areas. A lack of community resources is unsurprising, given other studies’ similar findings (see Coleman

et al., 2014; Fisher et al., 2011; Frazer, 2009). These findings confirm prior studies and suggest that resource deprivation is not limited to the specific states in which those studies were conducted. Kawachi (2006) and Ebin (2006) both noted the importance of community resources for bisexual people, and it appears these needs are not being met for individuals in rural areas. These findings call for the development of community resources for bisexual people in rural areas.

Findings from this study can be applied to multiple areas of work, with specific implications for counseling, advocacy, and community resource development. Importantly, this study has implications outside of these three areas, as multiple participants described sharing their stories as cathartic and validating. Multiple participants described this study as the only chance they have had to fully tell their stories. Although not directly related to practice, it is significant that participants felt this validation and expressed interest in seeing the final product. As previously explained, this study contributed to Randy finding an identity label that better fit his experience. Randy also described his experience as helpful, challenging, and important because of his comfort with his identity.

It's helpful. That's why I responded even though it's, it's interesting to think about it and can be...challenging. I'm at a spot in my life where it's easier for me to talk about it. That's why I responded to your message.

More direct applications of findings are described below.

### **Implications for Counseling**

As previously stated, RCT pays tribute to the importance of addressing intersectionality in direct practice. Previous literature has pointed to the importance of intersectionality in counseling (McDowell & Hernández, 2010; Ramsay, 2014; Watts-Jones, 2010). This project



reinforces the need to view clients from an intersectional perspective, as there were unique findings associated with the cross between rurality and sexuality. Viewing clients as more than a single identity will allow counselors to tailor interventions to meet the specific needs of their clients. In this case, these interventions may include connecting bisexual men to known community resources that can help meet their needs.

This project also emphasized the unique definitions participants gave their bisexuality. Bisexuality may often be assumed to simply be attraction to men and women, but Firechild, Robert, and Randy all had definitions that did not meet this standard. If a person reports having a partner or partners of a specific gender, it is easy to assume that person is heterosexual or homosexual, depending on the gender. This assumption is often untrue, given rising rates of individuals identifying in the middle of the spectrum of sexuality (Rodriguez, 2016). Firechild's narrative points specifically to the power of language in counseling. Counselors must be aware of the bias toward monogamy in United States culture, when that clearly does not apply to all clients' experiences.

Finally, counselors must also understand the social climate surrounding bisexual men and the unique aspects of growing up bisexual in a rural area. As evidenced by multiple participants' experiences, many bisexual men face substantial biphobia in rural areas. Counselors must be aware of these facts, as coming out as bisexual may not be the safest option for clients who are not out. The hostility toward bisexual men within the LGBTQ+ community (Herek, 2004) must also be addressed when referring clients to community organizations, as some may not be bi-positive or have services specifically for bisexual individuals. Counselors may also be required to continue engaging in conversations with bisexual male clients on the redefinition some may apply this label, based on their current life stage.

## **Implications for Advocacy**

The project itself fits with the social justice initiatives present in psychology and counseling, as it gives voice to a largely understudied population. Both the American Psychological Association and the American Counseling Association have taken stances that their members are to be advocates and engage in social justice (Counselor for Social Justice, 2016; Munsey, 2011). These initiatives include research and advocacy with sexual minorities.

RCT acknowledges the importance of growth-fostering environments in individuals' lives (Jordan, 2010). As evidenced by the findings of this study, bisexual men in rural areas sometimes do not live in growth-fostering communities. This is an important fact, as not all bisexual men move to larger, metropolitan areas in order to be in an open environment. Social justice workers must acknowledge that their work needs to expand beyond metropolitans and into rural towns and communities. These efforts may include going into smaller communities and educating school teachers and administrators, religious leaders, and health service providers on the realities of being bisexual. As Randy stated, people in rural communities are less exposed to diversity and often get their information about other groups from the media. Providing education can foster better understanding of these men's lives, instead of allowing negative controlling images to inform these communities' conceptualizations.

Additional opportunities exist to partner with any LGBTQ+ organizations in rural areas. Although these participants reported having no community resources in their hometowns, with the exception of Joe, other rural areas may have school Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) and local Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) meetings. These organizations may not know how to provide for bisexual people the way they can for lesbian and gay individuals. The names of these organizations themselves erase bisexuality and other identities. Members can also

be educated on how to be bi-inclusive, including when naming organizations, and can then continue to do community advocacy in their towns. This form of advocacy allows community members to create change in their own homes, which is more likely to be lasting.

### **Implications for Community Resources**

It is important that the suggestions for community resources be taken as simply suggestions, as only individuals living in communities can clearly explain what needs they have based on their experiences. Robert captured this fact when he was asked what community resources he would like to see established for bisexual people in rural areas.

...I think it would depend on the community. Um, I think you have to engage in the community and what its identity is, before you can engage with the issue of helping LGBT kids. Um, because I think every, somebody, somebody who comes from, a bisexual person who comes from any community still identifies with that community because it's where they were raised. This statement captures the idea behind this project; engage with communities to create change. Participants suggested several different community resources for bisexual people in rural areas, but each community has specific needs that must be met.

Multiple participants expressed interest in establishing an LGBTQ+ community center in rural areas. Although this may be difficult, individuals may be able to partner with established community resources that exist in metropolitan cities. These resource centers could be satellite offices of the primary organization. Community centers would also allow bisexual people in rural areas to connect with other LGBTQ+ people. Randy touched on the importance of lesbian and gay people supporting bisexuals, and this space would encourage that support. Another point of mention is how important I believe it is for the gay and lesbian folks to validate the bisexual community. As you know most of the role models I had before college were gay and

I looked to them for direction as a self-identified bisexual. Without their validation, I could have never become a complete and integrated spirit open to radical acceptance of myself today.

Additionally, these resources may incorporate information from national organizations, such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) reports on coming out as bisexual, health disparities, and workplace experiences. Rural resources may also follow established models of bisexual organizing, such as the Bisexual Organizing Project (BOP) in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Although located in a metro area, many of HRC and BOP's services can be implemented to meet the needs of bisexual individuals in rural areas, including social events, sensitive trainings, and resource connections. With the assistance of partners from metro areas and counselors, individuals living in these rural communities may feel empowered to engage in self-advocacy and tailor new interventions to meet their specific needs. Hunter exemplified self-advocacy through becoming an advocate for other LGBTQ+ students online and in-person at his religious university. Although he eventually left this area, Hunter's experiences with national resources and resource in a metro area encouraged him to be open and proud about his bisexual identity despite the discrimination he faced.

### **Limitations**

This study is not without limitations. The first limitation is the amount of cases used for the study. Although enough cases were used to meet Stake's (2006) minimum standard of four, at least five more cases could have been used to expand understandings of bisexual men's identity development experiences. Additionally, Hunter omitted himself from submitting an artifact, which could have also facilitated more exploration of his experiences. The data may have also been altered had the definition of rurality been established using a standardized view, such as the Index of Relative Rurality. This definition may have restricted the eligible

participants and impact rurality had on identity development. The primary researcher chose to allow personal definitions of rurality because geographic upbringing impacts one's identity. Although all initial interviews were coded for consensus by a team, the rest of the data was analyzed by only the primary researcher. In order to further establish the trustworthiness of this study, all data could have been analyzed by the team. This practice may have altered the integration of data points.

As with most qualitative research, the subjective nature of data collection and interpretation will bias results, which is why all researchers identified potential biases and why this work was conceived as a social justice project. Consistency in administration may have also affected results, as some interviews were conducted via phone, some by Skype, and some in-person. These varying mediums may have caused different degrees of openness amongst participants. The theoretical foundation of this study also limits its findings and application, as RCT specifically looks at relational, social, and cultural influences, while observing less at an individualistic level. Had another theory been used, cases may have been presented separately, instead of in an overarching narrative. Finally, the nature of qualitative research limits this study's generalizability, as the amount of participants is too small to be descriptive of large groups. Importantly, the goal of qualitative research is not to generalize, but to gain an in-depth understanding of the chosen subject, which this study did.

### **Future Research**

One primary contribution of this study is awareness of the unique aspects of growing up as bisexual and male in a rural area. Research in this area is very limited and must continue. Future qualitative research could use more cases and different parameters for inclusion, in order to gain new information on this population's experiences. Additionally, researchers could also

use different data points to encourage sharing stories from other perspective. The coding process may also be done collaboratively across all data points in future studies. If researchers could gather enough participants from one community, expansive knowledge can be gained to create change in that environment.

Quantitative research is also necessary to address this topic. Potential quantitative projects could address attitudes toward bisexuality in rural communities by polling the general populous. Bisexual men could also be polled across the country using quantitative methods, giving a larger scope for the findings. These studies may also provide more generalizable results and give a clearer picture of what values exist in rural communities. Other research paradigms, such as mixed-methods and Q-methodology, may provide distinctive data.

Finally, another area of research this study brought attention to is the differing experiences of bisexual men and bisexual women. Although previous research has shown more accepting attitudes toward bisexual women than bisexual men (Pew Research Center, 2013), the intersection of rurality, gender, and sexuality has not been studied. Various participants reflected that they felt it was easier to be a bisexual woman than a bisexual man. This suggestion reflects Helms and Waters' (2016) study, which found significantly less positive attitudes toward bisexual men than bisexual women, gay men, and lesbian women.

Despite their being more perceived acceptance for bisexual women, that does not mean they do not experience discrimination or unique experiences. A similar study to this one could be conducted to explore the experiences of bisexual women in rural areas, in order to help understand their contextualized lives. These narratives may reaffirm some patterns of female sexuality being for the male gaze, as evidenced by multiple participants' discussions. That study could also evaluate the potential implications for specific community resources for bisexual

women. Importantly, studies could also analyze the identities of rural transgender and genderqueer individuals who also identify as bisexual.

The researchers conducted this study to gain knowledge of the identity development experiences of bisexual men from rural areas and their community resource needs. The researchers used multiple case study methodology, consisting of five cases and four data points across each case, with the exception of one case that had three data points. Findings suggest growing up bisexual in a rural area is a distinct experience that has specific relational influence, challenges, and features. Additionally, it appears that bisexual men in rural areas may lack the community resources that help LGBTQ+ people in metropolitan areas. Findings can be used to inform counseling and advocacy interventions, as well as the development of community resources in rural communities. Although this study has limitations, the findings and implications are substantial, as this community is often left out of psychological research. Most importantly, this study gave participants the opportunity to share their stories and have their voices heard, which proved to be a cathartic and validating experience for them.

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## APPENDIX A

### EXTENDED REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much of the literature on sexual minorities addresses lesbian women and gay men, and bisexuals are often secondary in these studies (Worthen, 2013, Barker & Langdridge, 2008). The models of identity development that arise from these studies do not acknowledge concerns specific to the bisexual community (Brown, 2002). Similarly, most research on identity development is conducted on urban populations, ignoring needs and issues specific to rural populations. Because of these gaps in the literature, more research is needed addressing rural raised bisexuals. This study serves to address those gaps in the literature. Those who have lived this experience will be interviewed for this study, in an effort to bring attention to rural bisexuals and their needs, including community resource concerns. The purpose of this study is to establish bisexual identity development for rural people as a unique occurrence, apart from urban populations. As most identity development models are based on urban populations, it is important to take into consideration issues in development that are exclusive to rural populations (Gray, 2009). Additionally, this study will address the social aspects of identity development, such as community reaction, social support, and societal views, and their effects on bisexuals. The researchers plan to apply these findings to counseling practice and social justice community resource interventions.

## **Identity development**

Identity development studies can be traced back to the work of Sigmund Freud and his psychosexual stages of development. Freud addressed the importance of sexual urges in an individual's development, beginning with the oral stage at birth and ending with the genital state at puberty (Barnes, 1952). Erick Erickson then moved conceptualizations of identity development to encompass psychosocial factors. Most widely known for his eight stages of psychosocial development, Erikson theorized that individuals complete stages of development starting with infancy and ending with death (Erikson, 1989). Each of these stages is characterized by a psychosocial crisis in which two factors compete for prominence within a person, i.e. trust versus mistrust (Erikson, 1989). Erikson noted that the adolescent psychosocial crisis was of particular importance, labeling it the "identity crisis" (Erikson, 1968). This stage is characterized by the existential question "Who am I and what can I be?" (Erikson, 1980). Adolescents transition from childhood to adulthood during this crisis and establish a sense of self that may compliment or contrast who society says they should be (Erikson, 1968).

Of particular importance to this study is the sense of sexual identity developed during the adolescent stage of development. Although linked to sexual orientation and sexual behavior, sexual identity encompasses how one conceptualizes his or her own romantic or sexual attraction (Shively & DeCecco, 1977). Sexual identity development is largely studied within development of sexual minorities, specifically emphasizing gay and lesbian identity development (Dillon, Worthington, & Moradi, 2011). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals often develop their identity in unsupportive communities with people unlike them, unlike those of racial and ethnic minority groups (Rosario, Scrimshaw, Hunter, & Braun, 2006). Development as an LGB individual comes with many challenges associated with minority stress and negative stereotypes



(Hamilton, 2011). One of the most significant contributors to the work on sexual identity is Alfred Kinsey. Kinsey developed Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale, colloquially referred to as the Kinsey Scale (Dodge, Reece, & Gebhard, 2008b). Although flawed in their designs and findings, Kinsey's studies are known for exposing the world to sexuality studies and for acknowledging the real existence of bisexuality (Fairington, 2008).

Other theories of identity development include moral development, relational conceptualizations of identity, moral identity, and ecological identity. Moral development draws heavily on the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, who was inspired by the work of Jean Piaget. Kohlberg developed six stages of moral development beginning with obedience and punishment and culminating with universal ethical principles (Kohlberg, 1973). These are worth noting in relation to LGB individuals due to the moral debate many LGB and non-LGB people have regarding same-sex attraction and behaviors. LGB individuals may struggle with the morality of their own identity, which could lead to internalized homophobic attitudes.

Urie Bronfenbrenner developed ideas on how individuals develop in context to the ecological systems around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This conceptualization of identity identifies five specific systems that affect individuals: (a) microsystem; (b) mesosystem; (c) exosystem; (d) macrosystem; (e) chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Each layer more greatly emphasizes the social context of development. LGB individuals may face acceptance or resistance in any of these systems, specifically within their microsystem, which includes family and peers, and their macrosystem, which includes the cultural ideas regarding sexuality (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Given some of the negative LGB stereotypes that arise within American culture, it is not unfounded to suggest that LGB people may experience challenges in development within these systems.

Jean Baker Miller (1976) purported that individuals develop in relation to others. Important aspects of identity development include connection, growth-fostering relationships, controlling images, and relational images, among other things (Miller, 1986). Positive development occurs when individuals engage in growth-fostering relationships, which include mutual empathy and empowerment (Miller, 1986). Various difficulties may arise when individuals feel disempowered or in a power-down position within relationships, resulting in disconnection (Miller, 1986). Miller's understanding of development in relation to others is of particular importance when one considers the negative controlling images LGB people face in society.

### **Gay and Lesbian Identity Development**

Many models of gay and lesbian identity development have been cited in research (see Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014, Degges-White, Rice, and Myers, 2000, Cox & Gallois, 1996 for examples), with the most prominently cited model coming from Cass (1979). Cass (1979) purported that gay identity development occurred in six stages, beginning with "identity confusion" and culminating in "identity synthesis." Identity synthesis refers to a point that one arrives at in which both personal and public homosexual identities are integrated within the person (Cass, 1979). Throughout the years, Cass's model has come under fire for its linearity, lack of applicability to non-gays and lesbians, application to mostly White individuals, and lack of acknowledgement of the different aspects of identity for men and women (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014). With the changing social climate, Cass's model may not be the most reliable model for today's gay and lesbian identity development (Kenneady & Oswalt, 2014).

Stages of gay identity development are affected by minority stress, which includes feelings of prejudice, isolation, and internalized homophobia (Dentato, 2011). According to

Reicherzer (2005) LGB individuals must also cope with shame and oppression during development of their sexual identities. These two aspects can take the form of broad, societal images such as banning same-sex marriage and hate crimes, or more individual experiences like family and social rejection (Reicherzer, 2005). Shame and oppression are difficulties that hinder LGB individuals' arrival at self-acceptance and in relationship to others (Reicherzer, 2005).

### **Bisexual Identity Development**

According to Storr (1999), bisexual identity arose from the movement toward "postmodernity," which emphasizes states of being, such as being bisexual. There is great disagreement regarding the definition of bisexual identity (Fairington, 2008). Various definitions include attraction to males and females (Morrow, 1989), attraction to multiple sexes or genders (Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009), sexual behavior with individuals of multiple sexes (Morgan & Thompson, 2007), and self-identification (Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009). Importantly, some individuals choose to identify themselves for political reasons (Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009). Some use this label to bring awareness to an often ignored identity group (Barker, Richards, & Bowes-Catton, 2009).

In Bradford's (2004) interviews of 20 bisexuals, individuals noted that lack of role models and social support delayed their identity actualization. Conversely, connection to a supportive community harbored more positive identity development experiences (Bradford, 2004). Meyer (2003) noted that identity development for bisexuals is continuous, never-ending, and personalized. Development is affected by the notion that bisexuality is seen by society as a transitional phase (Meyer, 2003). Importantly, the definition of bisexuality has been shown to be specific to the person using the label, leaving only partial overarching commonalities within the identity group (Reicherzer, 2005)

With established identity categories come identity development models. One of the most widely used bisexual identity development models came from Tom Brown. Brown (2002) built upon an earlier model of bisexual identity development and established the following four stages: Initial Confusion, Finding and Applying the Label, Settling in the Identity, and Identity Maintenance (which replaced “Continued Uncertainty;” see Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994). This model was developed on a population in San Francisco, California, an urban population. Using urban populations is common because of the convenience in sampling but may prove problematic when applying findings to rural populations.

### **Impact of Religion**

Religion is often an impactful portion of people’s identities (Fowler, 1981). Historically, religious institutions have rejected LGBTQ+ identities, as many see same-sex sexual behavior as immoral (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001; Sherkat, 2002). Those who are part of religious groups that are not affirming may face severe psychological health disparities (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). These attitudes often require LGBTQ individuals to negotiate their religious identities and their sexual identities. Wood and Conley (2014) found that these negotiations typically take four forms, (a) identity integration; (b) compartmentalization; (c) rejection of sexual identity; (d) rejection of religious identity. Three of these negotiations, compartmentalization, rejection of sexuality, and rejection of religion result in individuals not being able to live authentically. No matter the outcome, the struggles brought on by rejection, discrimination, and religious struggles often cause psychological distress (Ellison & Lee, 2010). Conversely, if individuals join LGBTQ-affirming religious communities, then they are more likely to integrate their faith and sexuality (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005). Importantly, sects of mainstream religions seem to be growing more accepting of homosexuality

(Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). Examples of this growing acceptance include recent changes in stances on homosexuality in some mainline Protestant churches, the establishment of the Gay Christian Network, celebration of LGBTQ+ identities found in the Unitarian Universalist Church, and acceptance in Reform and Reconstructionist Jewish faith groups. Similar to larger societal views, religious acceptance of bisexual and transgender lives may be lagging behind (Bernhardt-House, 2010). This lack of acceptance may negatively impact bisexual men's identity development.

### **Bisexual Invisibility**

A consistent finding in psychological literature is that members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community require connection to community resources and other like individuals for positive development (Kawachi, 2006). This need is habitually not met for bisexual individuals because they are part of an invisible population. Often ignored or lumped with gay men and lesbians in psychological literature, community outreach, and public policy, unique needs of bisexuals get ignored by mainstream society (Steinman, 2001). Bradford (2004) interviewed 20 participants that identify as bisexual and reported themes contributing to invisibility included lack of role models, lack of support, and biphobia.

Although approximately 2.2% of women and 1.4% of men self-identify as bisexual (American Institute of Bisexuality, 2015), outwardly these individuals can easily be misconstrued as gay, lesbian, or heterosexual, depending on the sex of a partner or friends they may have. Some gay men and lesbians see this as bisexuals attempting to maintain a piece of their heterosexual privilege (Eliason, 2000). Unfortunately, these assumptions undermine the identity of bisexuals and are rooted in biphobia and can result in bisexuals giving up part of their

identity for the sake of a better understood and accepted label. Individuals who do acknowledge bisexuality in life and literature often see it as an unobtainable "utopia" that could unify humanity under an umbrella of sexuality (Barker & Langdridge, 2008). Steinman (2001) purported that bisexual invisibility and its negative effects can be eliminated if bisexuals are connected to community resources directed specifically to meet their needs. Establishing more information about bisexuals' identity development patterns can help community outreach organizations better meet the unique needs of these individuals.

### **Societal Stereotypes**

Bisexuals are faced with many negative controlling images put forth from dichotomous views of sexuality (Obradors-Campos, 2011). Prominent examples of stereotypes about bisexuals include: (a) bisexuals do not exist (Zivony & Lobel, 2014); (b) bisexuality is a phase between a solidified heterosexual or homosexual identity (Meyer, 2003); (c) bisexuals cannot make up their minds or are confused (Fox, 1991); (d) bisexuals are sexually promiscuous (Israel & Mohr, 2004); (e) bisexuals are not suitable partners because they cannot be monogamous (Udis-Kessler, 1996). These stereotypes are perpetuated by both heterosexuals and homosexuals. Negative images can lead to bisexuals' identities and rights being devalued or erased. Not only are these images incorrect, they have negative effects on bisexual individuals including less rates of coming out, more social isolation, and negative mental and physical health issues.

### **Health Outcomes**

Bisexuals often report more negative health outcomes than their heterosexuals, lesbian, and gay peers (Bostwick, 2005). Previous research has shown that bisexuals often report higher levels of anxiety (Davis & Wright, 2001), depression (Dodge & Sandfort, 2007), suicidal ideation (Jorm, Korten, Rodgers, Jacomb, & Christensen, 2002), and substance abuse (Drabble,

2005). Dodge, Jefferies, & Sandfort (2008a) found that STI/HIV rates are also significantly higher for bisexual men than their gay and heterosexual peers. Less attention has been given to sexual health of bisexual women. With these negative health outcomes, come negative societal stereotypes that leave bisexuals feeling isolated from community (Eady, Dobinson, & Ross, 2010; Kawachi, 2006).

Recent studies have sought to identify ways to improve bisexual health. Dodge et al. (2012) interviewed 75 behaviorally bisexual men on important issues when seeking health services and found that privacy and trust were the two most important aspects for participants. Participants often wanted to assure that they were not going to be forced to disclose their sexuality (Dodge et al., 2012). In conducting this study, Dodge et al. (2012) had participants identify the best ways to reach bisexual men with health services and many noted individual case management would be most effective. Eady, Dobinson, & Ross (2010) found that it was important for mental health service providers to be open and positive when bisexuals disclose their sexual experiences. Also of importance in for enhancing bisexual health is connection to a community and community resources (Ebin, 2006). Ebin (2006) noted the importance of efforts such as phone counseling and support groups in reducing HIV rates among bisexual individuals. Connections to other bisexuals and to bi-positive resources prove fruitful for promoting positive health (Ebin, 2006).

### **Phobic Attitudes**

#### **Homophobia**

Homophobia is defined as an "irrational fear or intolerance of homosexuality (Bhugra, 1987). In his review of homophobia literature to 1987, Bhugra (1987) noted that negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians were often rooted in stereotypes and misunderstandings, i.e.

homosexuality is an illness, homosexual males are promiscuous and carry STIs, homosexuals recruit others to their lifestyle, and homosexuals prey on children (see t Appendix B for additional statements). Although popular opinion and assumptions about gays and lesbians have drastically changed (see Appendix B), in an updated literature review Ahmad and Bhugra (2010) noted homophobia is still an issue gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are faced with. With changing attitudes toward LGBQ individuals, the root of homophobia seems to now be tied to discrimination rather than fear (Ahmad & Bhiugra, 2010).

Increased attention has been given to the concepts of internalized homophobia, heterosexism, and internalized heterosexism (Ahmad & Bhugra, 2010). Internalized homophobia refers the process by which LGBTQ individuals turn homophobic cultural values inward (Malyon, 1982). This internalization has been associated with negative health outcomes, greater minority stress (Szymanski & Chung, 2003), relational distress (Frost & Meyer, 2009), and lower self-esteem (Allen & Oleson, 1999), and poses difficulty for HIV prevention strategies (Huebner, Davis, Nemeroff, & Aiken, 2002). Heterosexism, the systemic institutionalization of homophobia and discrimination (McKee, Hayes, & Axiotis, 1994), can have negative effects on LGBTQ individuals that include work problems (Waldo, 1999), health concerns (Gamarel, Neilands, Dilworth, Taylor, & Johnson, 2015), and relational distress (Gamarel et al., 2015). Heterosexism, like homophobia, has the potential to be internalized, resulting internalized heterosexism (Szymanski, Kashubeck-West, & Meyer, 2008)

### **Biphobia**

Biphobia is an oppressive force used to discriminate against, and persecute bisexuals (Jorm, Korten, Rodgers, Jacomb & Christensen, 2002). This draws from the earlier established construct called homophobia, which is discrimination against homosexuals on the part of



heterosexuals (Herek, 2004). Unique to biphobia, is the potential for perpetration by both heterosexuals and homosexuals. While lesbians and gay men are often belittled by their heterosexual peers, bisexuals are also belittled by their sexual minority peers (Herek, 2004).

Biphobia was found to be a measurable construct by Mulick and Wright Jr. (2002). The Biphobia Scale is a measure of biphobic attitudes, and Mulick and Wright Jr.'s (2002) study showed that 42% of individuals surveyed scored in the moderate to high biphobic range. This sample consisted of both heterosexuals and homosexuals. These attitudes can often lead to lower reported levels of mental health, greater internalized biphobia, and more difficult coming out processes (Jorm et al., 2002). In the 2011 Stonewall Report, See and Hunt (2011) found that 55% of bisexual respondents were not out about their sexual orientation in the workplace, which is understandable given the attitudes many display toward bisexuals. Biphobia surrounds people that identify as bisexual and are told they are not natural by heterosexuals and other sexual minorities, leading to deficits in health and social environments (Jorm et al., 2002).

Obradors-Campos (2011) purported that biphobia is rooted in "gender binarism" and hegemonic masculinity. The gender binary refers to societal views of men and women being natural opposites and that division being the "normal" method of human behavior (Obradors-Campos, 2001). Hegemonic masculinity stems from American views of the gender binary, referring to the traditional roles men are expected to take, such as constricted displays of emotion, focus on the self, and being the breadwinners of families (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Bisexuality inherently defies these concepts, as two assumptions of the binary are rigid differences between masculinity and femininity and rigid sexuality, most commonly heterosexuality, as the norm (Obradors-Campos, 2011).

Individuals who are bisexual often exhibit more fluidity in their gender and sexual presentation than those of the traditional heterosexual or homosexual populations (Obradors-Campos, 2011). While heterosexuals are often thought to display traditional masculinity and femininity, homosexuals are stereotyped to do almost the complete opposite, but bisexuals confuse the system (Obradors-Campos, 2011). Biphobia arises when monosexuals rebel against individuals that can exist in the borderlands of sexuality (Obradors-Campos, 2011). For example, a male that displays hegemonic masculinity may have no trouble persecuting the gay man he sees on the street, but how does he persecute the man that may be seen with a man but may also be seen with a woman. Similarly, a lesbian woman may react to a bisexual woman negatively because she hurts the "gay cause" by exhibiting "heterosexual behavior" and has a choice between heterosexuality and homosexuality (See & Hunt, 2011). This oppression gives rise to biphobia rooted in the gender binary.

### **Rural Life**

It is important to note that definitions of rurality differ based upon the organization or person classifying the area and each definition accounts for only part of the rural experience. (Waldorf, 2006). For example, the Index of Relative Rurality takes into account population size, population density, percentage of urban residents, and distance to metropolitan areas (Waldorf, 2007). According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 60 million Americans live in areas that would be classified as rural (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This same census defined a rural area as an area that is not "urban" or "peri-urban" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The Rural Health Research Center at the University of Washington (RUCA) defines a rural area as an area in which the primary flow of commuting is to an outside area, typically to an urbanized area or urban cluster (Rural Health Research Center, 2015). Importantly, RUCA defines a small town as

having primary flow to a small urban cluster (Rural Health Research Center, 2015). These classifications are based on population density, urbanization, and daily commuting (United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2015).

### **Health disparities**

Rural America is often classified by many health challenges. Americans from rural areas often report higher risk of diabetes (Hale, Bennett, & Probst, 2010), smoking, obesity, and other chronic illness (Joyner, O' Connor, Thrasher, & Blouin, 2012). Individuals from rural communities also report comparable levels of mental health concerns to their urban counterparts (McCabe & Macnee, 2002). Little of this research addresses the needs of LGB individuals in rural areas. Boehmer (2002) found that on 0.1% of health research is on LGBT health and most of this is concentrated in rural areas. Fisher, Irwin, & Coleman (2014) noted that LGBT individuals in rural areas are less likely to have health insurance and more likely to smoke and binge drink than their urban counterparts. Although little research exists on the actual topic of LGB rural health, it is not unfounded to assume that they exist at the intersection of rural health issues and LGB health issues.

### **Resources**

Although individuals from rural areas face significant health issues, they often have less health resources to seek for assistance (McCabe & Macnee, 2002). According to the National Rural Health Association Policy Position (2008), only 12% of pharmacists and 9% of physicians practice in rural areas, while 20% of U.S. citizens live in rural areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE; 2012), a disparity between mental health services also exists between rural and urban areas, despite comparable rates of mental health issues.

WICHE identified three main restraints to mental health services in rural areas: (a) accessibility of nearby services, (b) availability of existing health providers, and (c) acceptability of needing assistance. In order to counteract these issues, various community resource agencies have attempted to reach out to rural communities in novel ways, such as telehealth (Rural Assistance Center, 2015) and rural health educators and assistants (National Rural Health Association, 2015). Within these initiatives, specific facets of rural LGB health are not addressed. Bisexual men and women report more barriers to accessing care and resources than their gay and lesbian counterparts (Smalley, Warren, & Barefoot, 2015). Medical and mental health providers have been shown to embrace some of the negative stereotypes of bisexuals (Gay and Lesbian Medical Association, 2001), which is problematic when coupled with health disparities bisexuals face.

Additionally, LGBTQ+ individuals in rural areas report weak resources, hostile social climates, and isolation as barriers to accessing community resources (Oswald & Culton, 2003). Bisexual people may not access these resources because they feel like resources are oriented toward only gay and lesbian people (Dobinson, MacDonnell, Hampson, Clipsham, & Chow, 2005). In their study of rural LGBTQ+ individuals in South Carolina, Coleman, Irwin, Wilson, and Miller (2014) found that the community lacked assistance with legal documents, finding LGBTQ+ safe businesses, connecting with faith communities, and accessing community resources. These findings were supported in Fisher, Irwin, Coleman, McCarthy, and Chavez's (2011) needs assessment of Nebraskan LGBT individuals. Although much of this sample was from a metropolitan area, 10% reported being from rural areas, and 66.6% of all participants felt their area lacked community resources for LGBT people (Fisher et al., 2011). LGBTQ+ individuals also struggle to access community resources in more urbanized states, such as New

York. Frazer (2009) found that individuals from rural areas and small towns in New York were much more likely to report distance and transportation as barriers to community resources than their counterparts who lived in Manhattan. These findings from varying geographic areas display that LGBTQ+ individuals lack resources across the country.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

The research questions were developed from a relational-cultural theoretical perspective (RCT). RCT arose from the work of Jean Baker-Miller and has a large focus on social, intimate, and familial related relationships that a person is in (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons & Salazar II, 2008). The theory purports that all psychological well-being or “deficiencies” stem from positive and negative relationships (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons & Salazar II, 2008). Miller (1976) also noted the importance of controlling images in individual development. Controlling images refer to the distorted representations of disenfranchised groups, developed by dominant groups. Examples of these would be the view that bisexuals are confused or untrustworthy, which are developed by more powerful groups. RCT emphasizes the impact shame can have on identity development, with specific impact on those who feel unworthy of love and connection due to negative controlling images (Reicherzer, 2005).

RCT also draws from a strong feminist and multicultural background, emphasizing intersectionality, which is the acknowledgement of intersecting marginalized identities (Frey, 2013). When conducting interviews, the social context, relationships, and intersections of identity of participants will be taken into account. Additionally, the interview will attempt to share power with the interviewee to avoid creating more shame and fear of disenfranchisement.

These principles informed the development of interview questions, as they inquire about the environment participants grew up in and how others affected their identity development process.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the review of the literature, two questions were developed from an RCT perspective.

- 1) What are the identity development experiences of bisexuals raised in rural environments?
- 2) What community needs do these individuals have that are not being addressed?

These questions led to the development of two community action oriented question:

- 3) How can we develop the appropriate community resources to benefit this population?
- 4) How can these resources be feasibly implemented

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW SCRIPT

- 1) Tell me about yourself (history, demographic info, interests, hometown, current residence, etc.).
- 2) What makes an area rural?
- 3) Considering where you grew up, how does this location relate to your definition of rural?
- 4) Adjust question to reflect demographic info: For what reasons do you continue to reside in this area; or for what reasons did you leave this area?
- 5) Describe your own process for identifying your sexual/affectional orientation.
- 6) Discuss a typical conversation or experience when you have come out to someone.
- 7) Describe your comfort level with being bisexual.
- 8) Tell me what it was like growing up where you lived.
- 9) How did growing up in a rural area affect your bisexual identity development?
- 10) What do you think it's like for (insert different sex) bisexuals compared to (insert participant's sex)?
- 11) Tell me about the resources in your community for sexual/affectional minorities.
- 12) What resources would you recommend or like to see instated for bisexual individuals in rural areas?
- 13) What else, if anything, would you like others to know about you or the bisexual community?

## APPENDIX C

### RELATIONAL MAP

Place names/titles of individuals in boxes based on their relationship to you (Family, Friends, Others) and their impact on your bisexual identity development (Negative, Neutral, Positive) Please place individuals in the box from most influential to least influential. Note: importance and role of any individual may change across time; depiction is based upon an overall role Individuals may hold dual roles (i.e. friend and family member); depicted in primary role On the back of this paper (or in an added text box if typing), please explain any relationships that you believe require more detail.

**Influence on My Identity Development as a Bisexual**

Other significant people, including community members			
Friends			
Family (specify biological, adopted, or family of choice)			

←—————→  
 Negative                      Neutral                      Positive  
 Barrier                      Disinterested                      Supportive



## APPENDIX D

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

What is your gender?   \_\_\_Male                   \_\_\_Female                   \_\_\_Transgender

Please rate your gender identity from 1 (non-transgender) to 7 (transgender).

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Non-transgender

Transgender

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your highest educational attainment?

\_\_\_ Less than high school graduate

\_\_\_ High school graduate or GED

\_\_\_ Current College freshman

\_\_\_ Current College sophomore

\_\_\_ Current College junior

\_\_\_ Current College senior

\_\_\_ College graduate

\_\_\_ Currently pursuing a graduate degree

\_\_\_ Master's degree

\_\_\_ PhD or professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)

What is your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply)

Caucasian/White/European American

African American

Hispanic/Latino

Asian

Native American

Pacific Islander

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

What is your sexual orientation? (check one box)

Gay

Lesbian

Bisexual

Questioning

Heterosexual

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate your sexual/affectional orientation from 1(strictly Gay/Lesbian) to 7(strictly Straight).

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

Gay/Lesbian

Bisexual

Straight

Have your parents been involved with a religious organization that is against lesbian, gay, or bisexual sexual/affectional orientations?

Yes

No

What was your family's estimated annual income level?

\_\_\_\_ Less than \$10,000

\_\_\_\_ \$10,001 to \$15,000

\_\_\_\_ \$15,001 to \$20,000

\_\_\_\_ \$20,001 to \$25,000

\_\_\_\_ \$25,001 to \$30,000

\_\_\_\_ \$30,001 to \$40,000

\_\_\_\_ \$40,001 to \$50,000

\_\_\_\_ \$50,001 to \$60,000

\_\_\_\_ \$60,001 to \$70,000

\_\_\_\_ \$70,001 to \$80,000

\_\_\_\_ \$80,001 or more

What city and state do you currently live in (include zip code)?

What city and state would you consider your primary upbringing (include zip code)?

How did you hear about this study?

## APPENDIX E

### PARTICIPANT RIGHTS FORM

#### PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

#### OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

**PROJECT TITLE:** "Born and Raised in the Boondocks": Bisexual Men's Experiences Reared in Rural Areas

**INVESTIGATORS:**

Colton Brown, MS (Primary Investigator)

Counseling Psychology Doctoral Student

Oklahoma State University

Tonya Hammer, PhD (Advisor)

Assistant Professor, Counseling

Oklahoma State University - Tulsa

**PURPOSE:**

Research on bisexuals is scarce and often put under the umbrella of lesbian/gay studies (de Bruin & Arndt, 2010). What is known from prior research is that bisexuals consistently report lower levels of health and more experiences of discrimination than their heterosexual, lesbian, and gay peers (Hoang, Holloway, & Mendoza, 2011). Rural populations similarly report lower levels of mental health and greater risk factors than their urban counterparts, with research indicating that

gays and lesbians growing up in rural areas report more experiences of discrimination and homophobia than those raised in urban areas (O'Connor & Wellenius, 2012; Whiting, Boone, & Cohn, 2012). Importantly, these research areas do not account for unique experiences of bisexuals raised in rural environments. This study serves to give a voice to this marginalized population and to identify important themes in their identity development. Additionally, this study will provide information used for community resource development.

## **PROCEDURES**

You will complete two in-person interviews, one being at the start of the study and the other being at the conclusion of the study. The first interview will be approximately one hour in length and the second will be approximately 10-20 minutes. Additionally, you will be asked to bring in artifacts that represent your community and bisexual identity development. Finally, you will be asked to complete a "relational influence diagram". You have the right to opt out of any part of this study without penalty.

## **RISKS OF PARTICIPATION:**

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. If you do feel any discomfort, then you have the right to withdraw from the study, and your responses will not be used. Contact information for counseling services can be provided if you feel it is necessary.

## **BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION:**

Participants will receive \$10 after completion of the relational influence map stage and an additional \$20 after completing their final interview. Although there may be no direct benefit to

you, this study has the potential to debunk stereotypes surrounding bisexuality. Additionally, this study and the follow-up dissertation study will be used to inform community resource formation primarily in rural locations, but also for the bisexual community as a whole. Finally, counseling implications will be drawn from findings.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Your identifying information will be kept confidential. Signatures on forms will contain initials only, and you will be allowed to choose a pseudonym to use during the interview process should you choose. All recorded interviews will be kept on a password protected computer in a password protected storage system. All transcripts and data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's advisor's office when not being used. Your demographic data will be stored separately from your transcripts.

**CONTACTS:**

You may contact the primary investigator or his advisor with any questions about your rights as a participant. The primary researcher can be reached by e-mail at [colton.brown@okstate.edu](mailto:colton.brown@okstate.edu) or by phone at 706-404-6563. His advisor can be reached by e-mail at [tonya.hammer@okstate.edu](mailto:tonya.hammer@okstate.edu) or by phone at 918-594-8309.

**PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:**

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty. I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation.

I also understand the following statements: I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and fully understand this consent form. A copy of this form will be given to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

It is recommended that you print a copy of this consent page for your records before you begin the study. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, Dr. Hugh Crethar at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

## APPENDIX F

### COMPLETED RELATIONAL MAPS

Firechild

Place names/titles of individuals in boxes based on their relationship to you (Family, Friends, Others) and their impact on your bisexual identity development (Negative, Neutral, Positive)

Please place individuals in the box from most influential to least influential.

Note: importance and role of any individual may change across time; depiction is based upon an overall role

Individuals may hold dual roles (i.e. friend and family member); depicted in primary role

On the back of this paper (or in an added text box if typing), please explain any relationships that you believe require more detail.

**Influence on My Identity Development as a Bisexual**

Other significant people, including community members	SOME PRIESTS SOME EMPLOYERS	NUNS SOME EMPLOYERS	SOME PRIESTS TOHR (EMPLOYER) CKEQ
Friends	SCHOOL K-12 CONSERVATIVES 1ST WIFE	SOME ART FRIENDS 2ND WIFE	MARTY COLLEGE MS/ART FRIENDS PROGRESSIVES
Family (specify biological, adopted, or family of choice)	FATHER 1ST MOTHER SISTER (PAT)	BROTHER	SISTER (BESS)

← Negative/Barrier      Neutral/Disinterested      Positive/Supportive →



Robert

Place names/titles of individuals in boxes based on their relationship to you (Family, Friends, Others) and their impact on your bisexual identity development (Negative, Neutral, Positive)

Please place individuals in the box from most influential to least influential.

Note: importance and role of any individual may change across time; depiction is based upon an overall role

Individuals may hold dual roles (i.e. friend and family member); depicted in primary role

On the back of this paper (or in an added text box if typing), please explain any relationships that you believe require more detail.

### Influence on My Identity Development as a Bisexual

<p>Other significant people, including community members</p> <p>Friends</p> <p>Family (specify biological, adopted, or family of choice)</p>	<p>Pastor Community</p>	<p>Native Elders Teachers</p>	<p>CollegeProfs</p>
	<p>Fraternity HS Friends</p>	<p>coworkers</p>	<p>Best Friend</p>
	<p>Mother Father Aunt</p>	<p>Other Sibings Grandparents</p>	<p>Sister Uncle</p>

Negative/Barrier      Neutral/Disinterested      Positive/Supportive

Joe

Place names/titles of individuals in boxes based on their relationship to you (Family, Friends, Others) and their impact on your bisexual identity development (Negative, Neutral, Positive)

Please place individuals in the box from most influential to least influential.

Note: importance and role of any individual may change across time; depiction is based upon an overall role

Individuals may hold dual roles (i.e. friend and family member); depicted in primary role

On the back of this paper (or in an added text box if typing), please explain any relationships that you believe require more detail.

## Influence on My Identity Development as a Bisexual

Other significant people, including community members			Kayla (co-worker)
Friends			Jordan (best friend) AKeem (best friend) Caitlyn (friend)
Family (specify biological, adopted, or family of choice)	Josh (brother)		Peggy (aunt) - lesbian Matt (dad) Tiffani (step-mom) Virginia (grandma)

← Negative/Barrier      Neutral/Disinterested      Positive/Supportive →

Randy

**Influence on My Identity Development as a Bisexual/Gay**

Other significant people, including community members			
Friends			Bisexual Alliance Group
Family (specify biological, adopted, or family of choice)		Dad	Mom Step dad Aunt

← Negative/Barrier      Neutral/Disinterested      Positive/Supportive →

Hunter (Negative names blocked for privacy)

**Influence on My Identity Development as a Bisexual**

Place names/titles of individuals in boxes based on their relationship to you (Family, Friends, Others) and their impact on your bisexual identity development (Negative, Neutral, Positive)

Please place individuals in the box from most influential to least influential.

Note: importance and role of any individual may change across time; depiction is based upon an overall role

Individuals may hold dual roles (i.e. friend and family member); depicted in primary role

On the back of this paper (or in an added text box if typing), please explain any relationships that you believe require more detail.

Other significant people, including community members	[Redacted]	Blakey, former Captain	Jessica Boss [Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted]
Friends	[Redacted]	Matt Connor Daniel Derek	Natalie Mason Atticus Pineda Nathan Leslie Basil Matthew Vanessa Roshan
Family (specify biological, adopted, or family of choice)	Bio Dad	Bio Mom Bio Grandpa	Bio Sister Bio Grandma Bio Aunts/Uncles

← Negative/Barrier      Neutral/Disinterested      Positive/Supportive →

## TABLES

TABLE 1. DRESSLER'S ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT HOMOSEXUALS

1. Homosexuality is an illness.
2. Homosexuals frequent professions such as the arts and that male nurses and muscle-builders are usual homosexual.
3. Homosexuals are transvestites.
4. Homosexual men and women are unreliable.
5. All homosexuals are effeminate and lesbians 'mannish'.
6. Homosexual males are promiscuous and, as a result, venereal disease is a greater problem among the homosexual than the heterosexual population.
7. Legalisation of homosexual conduct will cause increased homosexuality.
8. Homosexual individuals evangelistically recruit others to their sexual preferences
9. Homosexual males prey on children by seduction and rape.

TABLE 2. NEW ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT HOMOSEXUALS

1. Homosexuals are all knowledgeable and open about sex.
2. Homosexuals (males particularly) are sexually very active and enjoy sex of all types more readily than heterosexual counterparts.
3. Homosexuals have more disposable income than heterosexual counterparts and earn well.
4. Homosexuals are hedonistic and are not weighed down by responsibilities (like their heterosexual counterparts).
5. It is desirable for heterosexual females to have a 'gay best friend' and they are conversely labelled 'fag hags'.
6. Gay men are (overly) concerned with their physical appearance and are always well groomed, dress well and stylish.
7. Civil partnerships and gay parenting are ways of homosexuals fitting into society more effectively.
8. Gay men are funny and cheerful.
9. Lesbians either wish to look and act like men or are feminine 'lipstick lesbians'.

TABLE 3. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Pseudonym	Gender	Gender Rating	Age	Educational Attainment	Race Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Sexual Orientation Rating	Participation in Non-Affirming Religion	Family's Estimated Income
Firechild	Male	1	61	Current College Sophomore	Caucasian	Bisexual	4	Yes	\$80,001+
Robert	Male	2	26	College Graduate	Native American	Bisexual	4	Yes	\$20,001 - \$25,000
Joe	Male	1	25	College Graduate	Caucasian, Asian	Bisexual	4	No	\$50,001 - \$60,000
Randy	Male	1	38	PhD or Professional Degree	Caucasian	Gay	1	Yes	\$80,001+
Hunter	Male	1	20	Current College Sophomore	Caucasian	Bisexual	4	Yes	\$70,001 - \$80,000

## FIGURES

## ARTIFACTS

Firechild





Robert



Joe



Randy (1 of 2, poem omitted for privacy)



## VITA

Colton Brown

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: "BORN AND RAISED IN THE BOONDOCKS": BISEXUAL MEN'S  
EXPERIENCES REARED IN RURAL AREAS

Major Field: Educational Psychology

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Psychology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2018.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Educational Psychology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 2014.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Sociology at Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia in 2012.

Experience:

Qualitative research, community organizing, teaching

Professional Memberships:

American Psychological Association, American Counseling Association